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# The Fatal Barter

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By

WILLIAM L. WATKINSON, D. D., LL. D.

*Author of "The Blind Spot," "The  
Supreme Conquest," etc.*

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TO  
THOMAS A. CURTIS, ESQ.,  
NOTTINGHAM  
MY TRUSTED FRIEND



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## CONTENTS

I.	THE FATAL BARTER . . . . .	9
	Jeremiah xxxvi. 32.	
II.	THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL . . . . .	27
	Revelation xxii. 1, 2.	
III.	SUPPRESSED DISCIPLESHIP . . . . .	44
	John xix. 38, 39.	
IV.	THE DIVINE COERCION OF EVIL . . . . .	63
	Psalm lxxvi. 10.	
V.	THE RESPECTIVE CLAIMS OF FACT AND THEORY . . . . .	80
	John iii. 4; vi. 52; 1 Cor. xv. 35.	
VI.	THE SIGH OF THE SINCERE . . . . .	96
	Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.	
VII.	THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT . . . . .	110
	Exodus xiii. 21.	
VIII.	THE SIN OF SELF-CONFIDENCE . . . . .	125
	Psalm xix. 13.	
IX.	THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION . . . . .	141
	Acts xvii. 18.	
X.	CHRIST AND ABNORMAL LIFE . . . . .	156
	Luke xix. 10.	
XI.	THE STANDARDIZATION OF CHARACTER . . . . .	170
	Ephesians iv. 13.	

XII.	THE REPROACH OF THE GOSPEL . . .	186
	Numbers xvi. 14.	
XIII.	THE ABSOLUTE GOOD . . .	202
	Proverbs x. 22.	
XIV.	THE SPADE-WORK OF THE KINGDOM . . .	216
	1 Kings v. 15.	
XV.	THE UNREASONABLENESS OF FEAR . . .	231
	Psalm cxii. 7.	
XVI.	LIMITATION AND COÖPERATION . . .	243
	1 Chronicles xxii. 14.	



# I

## THE FATAL BARTER

*Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.*—JER. XXXvi. 32.

RECALL the situation at the moment of this incident. Jeremiah had rebuked the corruptions of the court of Judah, warned the nation against forming an alliance with Egypt, and prophesied the approaching Babylonish captivity. His denunciations were written upon a roll by Baruch the scribe. Jehoiakim sent for the roll, and it was read to him as he sat in the winter palace. He was angry, cut the scroll with a pen-knife, and cast the shreds into the fire. Now follows our text. Another scroll is prepared containing all the words of the cremated document; "and there were added besides unto them many like words." We suggest, then, that a real parallel exists between the contemptuous rejection of the scroll by Jehoiakim and the rejection of revelation by many to-day; and we also desire to show that, so far from anything being gained by such rejection, all the old problems revive in exaggerated

forms. We may decline the explanations, threatenings, and hopes of these sacred pages; yet the enigmas of life are still with us, and they appear in forms deeper and darker than ever. Let us illustrate this in several cardinal particulars.

#### I. THE GENESIS AND DESIGN OF THE WORLD.

These constitute one of the first problems pressing for solution. Revelation declares that the world in which we find ourselves, and wherein we must work out our destiny, is the creation of the living, intelligent, and omnipotent God; that in Him it lives, moves, and has its being; and that He governs it to a wise, just, and benevolent end. Many find this explanation entirely unsatisfactory, and reject it; but, having refused the interpretation of revelation, are we in any better position in relation to the question of the origin, meaning, and end of things? Can we discover any more reasonable explanation of the source of the world, of its government and design? Hitherto we have not succeeded in doing so. It has been said by a German sceptic that "The sun is the supreme source of all our activity, both physical and intellectual. . . . Yes, were a religion of Nature still possible, we could not choose an object more worthy of our worship than the luminary adored by our ancestors." So far as we know, no better explanation of things may be expected from the rationalistic quarter. But does this relieve the mystery of creation, nature, and humanity? We think not. To conclude that this world of mani-

fold wonder and beauty ; this human race, with reason, science, love, and piety ; these long ages of history, implying harmony and design,—that all has arisen like a vapour out of the fires of the sun, is surely to aggravate the riddle of the universe and not to dissolve it. To assume that the orb has given birth to so many things greater than itself is to assume the impossible.

To believe in a personal God as the fountain of life and thought, beauty and joy, is, we confess, to rest in a great mystery ; but such faith is far more reasonable than that of the fire-worshipper. The problem of the world may not be put aside. It is the first of the obstinate questionings ; we cannot escape it, it insistently demands consideration ; and, refusing the explanation of revelation, we can only fall back on irrational and incredible theories. “Have ye not known ? have ye not heard ? hath it not been told you from the beginning ? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth ? It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers ; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. . . . Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number : He calleth them all by name ; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking.” Denying this sublime conception of the first Cause and sovereign Upholder of the universal frame, we “cannot

choose an object more worthy of our worship than the luminary adored by our ancestors." Surely there is more luminary than luminousness; we have not gained anything, but lost much, by consigning the sacred writing to the brazier. The enigma of the world returns, the difficulties are greater than ever; "many like words have been added unto it."

II. THE QUESTION OF LIBERTY. Revelation by many is renounced in the name of liberty. Our freedom, they hold, is arbitrarily narrowed by the sacred lawgivers. And these emancipated ones have placed on record the sense of enlargement and rapture they experienced when first they felt themselves free of the incubus of the righteous God and His commandments; yet, though we repudiate the throne, statutes, and government of God, we must still recognize the dominion of law, unrestricted liberty being simply impossible. On entering a free, public park, the first object to catch the eye is a table of laws instructing visitors as to what is, and is not, permitted within its boundaries, and threatening sundry summary penalties if they introduce a dog, venture on the grass, or pluck a flower. And this a *free* park! Yet we do not complain. These prohibitions preserve the park a paradise. Were they not enacted and duly enforced, it would become a bear-garden. Thus is it with society at large. If we revolt against the Supreme Lawgiver, if we break His bands asunder and cast away His cords from



us, still law and order must be enforced, or civilization lapses into barbarism. We may shatter the tables of stone ; but, having done so, they must immediately be replaced in some shape, or chaos is the penalty. The sacred parchment may be cast into the fieriest furnace ; but "Thou shalt not" is written in asbestos, and cannot be obliterated.

It may be argued, however, that if the necessity for law survives the destruction of revelation, we may create for ourselves a wider and worthier freedom. Let us, then, inquire whether this is likely. Mark three points as characteristic of the law laid down by revelation for the regulation of human conduct.

1. It assures us of our freedom. From the beginning to the end it distinguishes between us and necessitated nature. Everywhere it upholds the liberty of the human spirit, regards the power of choice as the essence of our greatness, and invests us with responsibility for our character and action. That we are no part of the mechanical world is the fundamental assumption of revelation, therein agreeing with the universal consciousness. But, having renounced the sacred oracle, the scepticism of the day proceeds to maintain that the idea of human freedom is the merest illusion. It is confidently asserted that the world is a vast and complicated machine ; it continues its purposeless and eternal grind, and we men and women are pins and cogs in the iron system, fixed and

necessitated like the wheel in the enginery of a mill. Have we improved our position, then, this time? The exact contrary is the truth. Under the pretense of enlarging our liberty, we are deprived of it absolutely. We are no more free than the bubble borne on the tide and the cloud driven by the wind. We are sold into the most tragic bondage of all; degraded into drudges of physiology, galley-slaves of circumstance, serfs of the cosmos. We are no longer men, but mario-nettes.

2. The divine law as expressed in revelation claims obedience as the law of reason, right, and love; and all may see that in keeping such law is liberty indeed. The higher law, as laid down in God's Word, contains nothing that does not commend itself to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart. But forswearing revelation, we must perforce turn to nature; and what now is the gain? If modern science teaches one thing clearly, it is that nature does not furnish high laws of conduct. As an observer of nature writes, after witnessing one of her strange sights, "The direst cruelty, animated by the tenderest love! The most savage egotism, prompted by an entire unselfishness! Such are some of the problems which nature furnishes, but will not solve." The law of God, as enjoined by revelation, is an expression of reasonableness, righteousness, and benignity; the law of nature, as interpreted by accredited scientists and philosophers, signifies rule without

reason, force without righteousness, and judgment without mercy. And if we turn from the material universe and seek the laws of conduct in our own ambiguous nature, we find no royal law of liberty. The book of the soul is as blotted and obscure as the page of nature.

3. Law as expressed in revelation is softened by divine clemency ; it expresses a gracious element elsewhere lacking. Mommsen writes concerning Roman law : "It seemed as if the law found a pleasure in presenting on all sides its sharpest spikes, in drawing the most extreme consequences, in forcibly obtruding on the bluntest understanding the tyrannic nature of right." This is not the characteristic of the legalism of revelation. The severe claims of the Old Testament are yet mellowed by the sentiment of consideration, sympathy, and tenderness. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide : neither will He keep His anger forever. For He knoweth our frame ; He remembereth that we are dust." Scores of such passages throw a softening light on the stern pages of the divine programme of human duty. Here it seems as though the law found pleasure in presenting on all sides, whenever possible, the genial, humane, and merciful ; in drawing the most indulgent consequences ; in demonstrating the reasonableness of right. A great love glows through all the austerity of the Mosaic dispensation. And the burden of the New

Testament is God's grace to a world of sinners ; it is one incomparable proclamation of pity, forgiveness, and salvation.

On the score of freedom, then, how much advantaged are we by the repudiation of the sacred canon ? No better ; only infinitely worse. Having before been beaten with whips, we are now chastised with scorpions. The freedom of the soul, the righteousness of law, the reality of grace, are precious doctrines surrendered. We dethrone the just and gracious Lawgiver, and, having broken His golden sceptre, proceed to occupy His place with blind, dark, capricious shapes, or shapelessnesses, called Fate, Force, Chance, Nemesis, Necessity, Destiny. The writing comes back, and many words, many terrible and painful words, are added to it.

III. THE QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE. It is vainly supposed that by the rejection of revelation we should escape the problem of sin. We are told that the Christian revelation, and it alone, stands between us and a simple natural gladness ; it, and it alone, is responsible for the sense of guilt and remorse, for our bitterest tears, our dark and terrible forebodings. If, once for all, we could turn our temples into skating-rinks and consign our Bibles to the trunk-maker, we should have done with sin, guilt, shame, and fear ; and there would be nothing to prevent our return to the sweet sun, the gaities of nature, and the music of the world.



Would this be so? Shall we at the same time get rid of the surplice and sackcloth and find life all sunshine, music, and flowers? We can hardly believe it. Although the design of the Christian revelation is to quicken the sense of sin, yet that sense exists apart from this revelation. All nations in all ages have been the subjects of bitter reasonings within themselves; shame, remorse, and despair were their familiar experiences, because they failed to fulfill the higher law enjoined by their conscience. This is equally true at the present hour concerning the nations outside Christendom. A few years ago the British Government sent out an expedition to India to observe an eclipse of the sun; and one of the members of the astronomical staff gives this graphic account of an affecting sight witnessed by them during their tour: "The forthcoming eclipse, which would be visible at Benares, brought with it, to the native mind, an unrivalled chance of salvation; for every pious Hindu believed that, could he but contrive to enter the Holy River at the moment that the shadow struck the water, his sins would be washed away from him and heaven be sure. Therefore, from every corner of that vast country came the pilgrims—hundreds, thousands, nay, millions of them; blocking the roads, choking the trains, congesting the stations. Dusty and footsore, weary and wayworn, dropping out of the way, lying down to die by the roadside; of all ranks, ages, and positions, but each with staff in

hand and the light of eager faith in their dark, patient eyes.”<sup>1</sup>

If anything is universal, it is the sense of sin and retribution. It often reveals itself in wild superstitions and grotesque strivings after salvation ; yet it is there, deep down in the soul of the peoples, and it will be reckoned with. Spurn the Christian revelation, burn it with fire, rake it in the ashes ; but remember that conscience remains crushed with the weight of its mysterious burden, tortured with the pangs of its mysterious pain. ·

In repudiating revelation we forfeit the only book in the world that deals seriously and effectually with that consciousness of sin which is our darkest problem ; that discovers the principle of sin, and discloses most vividly its subtle working, its lurid power and destructiveness. And, far beyond this, we have discarded the only document which shows in a rational manner how men may escape sin’s power and penalty. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the good news of pardon, purification, perfecting. It assures us that the vicious principle is no part of our true self ; that, despite our sin, we are essentially great, and that our complete recovery is possible in Christ. It is the good news of free grace, complete liberty, sanctifying power, and immortal hope to every child of the race. Although the New Testament is renounced—sin, devils, judgments, and hell remain potential in the human conscience. We

<sup>1</sup> *The Record of an Aeronaut.*

have rejected the physician, but left the plague ; overthrown the lighthouse, but left the rock ; wiped out the rainbow, but left the storm. Whilst the race is yet tormented by the consciousness of guilt and the apprehension of retribution, we condemn it to the mental agonies, unavailing sacrifices, and hopeless outlook of paganism. Whatever changes may mark the future in the science of medicine, the physical maladies of mankind will undoubtedly persist for ages ; and whatever changes the future may witness in theological and philosophical thought, the malady of the soul will continue clamorously demanding treatment : we are not about to outgrow the consciousness of sin, it will survive the consciousness of disease. Nay, so far from outgrowing this consciousness, is it not likely to become more acute with the growth of the race ? As Dante expresses it :

O noble conscience and without a stain,  
How sharp a sting is trivial fault to thee !

And if the increase of light and moral refinement implies an increase of sensibility in the individual, will it not signify the same with the race ? The pathetic cry, "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death ?" will still pierce the heavens ; and by disclaiming revelation we render the darkest problem darker still. The rejected scroll returns, and many like words of perplexity and condemnation are added unto it.

IV. THE QUESTION OF DUTY. The austere conception of duty given by revelation renders it unpopular. It enjoins a lofty righteousness, and insists that we ought to be prepared to make any and every sacrifice that this righteousness may be fulfilled. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." He must crucify the lower for the higher, the selfish for the social, the present for the future. The secret of life, declares the Master, is renunciation; through constant and profound self-denial do we attain personal perfection, true happiness, everlasting life. To many this view of duty is most distasteful; room must be left for self-will, caprice, egotism, indulgence. To the Greek the cross was "foolishness"; persuaded that a life of sensation and selfishness was the true life, what concern had he with a faith that required the crucifixion of the lusts of the flesh and of the mind? Thus is it permanently with the natural man. "Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, few there be that find it." We cannot tolerate the harsh condition, and indignantly fling the forbidding scroll into the fire.

But having committed the obnoxious document to the flames, how do we stand? How does it stand with a people who reject the law of self-sacrifice? All history shows that the spirit of egotism and indulgence is fatal to the grandeur of nations; and when they are bankrupt, the prophet comes back and proclaims the old stern law of

sacrifice, with many words of penalty added to it. How does it stand with the individual? Is he in any better plight? In the name of liberty and pleasure, the requirements of Christ are repudiated; it shall be roses, roses, roses all the way. But this course inevitably brings satiety, disgust, despair. The Prodigal Son is the standing picture for all time of the working and retribution of the selfish, self-willed, and sensual life. Readers of the biography of Lafcadio Hearn will remember how "he grew impatient of the prejudices of Anglo-Saxon pudency," rioted in grossness of thought and life, and made his home in a pagan land. Yet years later, when he began to think of his son's future, he wrote, "What shall I do with him? Send him to grim Puritans that he may be taught the Way of the Lord? I am beginning to think that really much of the ecclesiastical education (bad and cruel as I used to imagine it) is founded on the best experience of man under civilization; and I understand lots of things I used to think superstitious bosh, and now think solid wisdom."<sup>1</sup> So the prodigal comes to himself in the far country! Degraded and hungered, "he understands lots of things"; in fact, he apprehends life in another light, knows that the law of self-denial is inevitable, and that years of denial and resistance only make the writing the more painful. We cannot, by any ingenuity, evade the law of self-denial—it is written in the very consti-

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, vol. i, p. 63.



tution of things ; there is no great character, no satisfying power, no lasting civilization without it.

It may now be said, If self-sacrifice remains the condition of perfection in the individual and in society, the law is no longer so mysterious and obnoxious as it appears in revelation. Is this so? Having dispensed with revelation, where shall we betake ourselves for the study of the principle of renunciation? Shall we go to nature? Throughout nature the law of sacrifice is expressed with tragic severity; it is not less than appalling. Shall we go to history? The law of suffering as a condition of progress is truly terrible as it has asserted itself in the development of the race. Shall we go to philosophy for an exposition of this strange principle which underlies all life and evolution? We shudder at the law of self-denial as expounded in the pages of Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Leopardi. Reject Calvary as the central truth of life; yet the cross is fastened upon us, as it was upon Simon, whether we will or not. And there is nothing in this world so terrible as the cross away from Christ! That the ideal can be attained only through self-crucifixion, that blood and death are the price of growth and perfection, appears the darkest of enigmas, the most irrational, the most intolerable, the most cruel. Calvary does not exaggerate the cross; it mightily relieves it. Well may the Lord Jesus confront us with absolute confidence: "Take My yoke upon

you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls: for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." The law of self-sacrifice, so terrible elsewhere, finds its mildest, noblest expression in Him. Here it is seen illumined by reason, prompted by love, accompanied by strength, directed to the very highest ends in the sanctification and glorification of those who suffer it. At last the burden becomes "easy," it becomes "light"; we can even glory in it. But, rejecting revelation, the cross returns, heavier than before, bloodier than before: a cross without reason, without consolation, without crown.

Glance, finally, at —

V. THE QUESTION OF SUFFERING. Revelation is largely concerned with the evil principle active in humanity, and also with the manifold sorrows of life. But these maladies and afflictions are not in any degree occasioned by the faith. Not a solitary form of suffering has Christianity created; and, were it disavowed, not a single form would disappear. On the contrary, all suffering would be immensely exaggerated. The oracles of God give us the reason for suffering, show the moral profit of it, inspire with strength, soothe with sympathy, and well-nigh render us insensible to our wounds in the vision of everlasting victory. What ameliorations are left when revelation is rent away? Walter Pater speaks of "pale pagan consolations." The writer

of the Epistle to the Hebrews triumphantly declares that the Church of Christ has "strong consolation." So that, in renouncing our faith, we exchange "strong" consolation for that which is pale, yea, as pale as death itself. The physical anguish abides, whilst the moral fruit is denied; the material and social deprivations continue, but the spiritual compensation lapses; the gravestone is in as great demand as ever, only the holy text is deleted. In an eclipsed world like this we are indeed in a sorry plight without the truth, grace, and hope of the Gospel. "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." The mystery of trouble, suffering, and death is yet with us; and many words of aggravation are added to the black-bordered scroll.

It may be objected that we do not believe in doctrines because they are pleasant, but because they are true; and therefore the rational cannot console themselves with fables. All we need say here, in reply to this kind of objection, is that in all cases of perplexity we rest in the best solutions that we can find; and the solution of the great problems of human life tendered by the Church of God has held the field through two thousand years, to the satisfaction of millions of the sincerest and noblest men and women. If we are to doubt our great beliefs, let the infidel doubt his doubts. At any rate, let him give us a better gospel than the one of which he would deprive us;

for to suppose that Christendom will surrender the revelation that has made it, on the promise that a better creed will by and by be forthcoming, is to suppose that it can be swindled by a gigantic confidence-trick.

Vast is the responsibility of unbelief in conspiring to destroy the confidence of the multitude in Him who is the sum and substance of the sacred book. Walking on the banks of the river Trent, we recently noticed a conspicuous warning to passers-by against damaging the life-buoys provided in case of accident. We may justly wonder as to the motive of persons bent on committing such an outrage. Do they object to the shape of the thing? Does the colour offend their artistic sense? Are they sceptical about its floating qualities? Is it malevolence? Or is it sheer wantonness? They supply no substitute; and, having rendered unserviceable the apparatus of salvation, the drowning are left to perish. It is irrational, cruel, wicked! Is it not thus with those who seek to mar the life-buoy of revelation? Millions passing through deep waters have proved its preciousness. When the enemy came in like a flood, it prevented their sinking in the dark depths. When the overflowing river of sorrow swept them away, it kept their head above the wave. When they made total shipwreck of health and fortune, it brought them safe to land. And, trusting to its truth and virtue, the dying have triumphantly braved death's cold, sullen

stream until they were lost sight of in the glory of the yonder shore. If faith has its responsibilities, has not unbelief its responsibilities? Is it nothing to nullify the Gospel of our salvation, and to leave a world to struggle and sink hopelessly in an abyss of mystery and fear? As to all who have trusted in Christ, let them hold fast their confidence firm to the end, and they shall not be confounded.

## II

### THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL

*And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.—REV. xxii. 1, 2.*

WHATEVER mystery may rest upon the book of the Revelation, we shall not greatly err if we regard this river as symbolizing the truth and grace which flow forth from God in Christ for the life of the race.

I. THE SOURCE OF GOSPEL TRUTH AND BLESSING. "A river proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The truth and grace flowing to us from Christ are spiritual, supernatural, superhuman. They do not spring from beneath, but stream from above, directly out of the heart of God, out of the depths of eternity. Whatever may be said concerning the human element in revelation, we must not try to interpret it as an outcome of human reason; nor must we attempt to explain Jesus Christ as a result of evolution. Until we are prepared to acknowledge that Christianity cannot be accounted for by natural causes, it is impossible to appreciate the Gospel in



## 28 THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL

the sense in which it is written in the New Testament. To meet the extraordinary need of humanity, it pleased God to reveal Himself in an extraordinary manifestation of truth and grace. This position must be frankly recognized. Redemption in Christ is not contrary to nature, but outside it; not violating reason, but transcending it; not independent of history, but making a vehicle of history, as a stream is distinct from the channel along which it flows.

Yet the imagery of the text may remind us that, whilst the Gospel is essentially spiritual and supernatural in genesis and character, it is none the less positive and definite. "A river"; not a vapour. "A river"; not indefinite waters, but defined as a stream is by its banks. In the beginning "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." Many to-day in the theological world are fond of a mist that rises from the ground; they rebel against the concrete, the definite, the historical; they vapourize every great fact and doctrine of the Christian faith, and think that only when these have been sublimated into the mythical and poetic are they worthy of the intellectual. If, however, we "lay hold" of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus, we must hold by the tangible, the definite, the historical, the experimental. The Christian faith does not resemble the Oriental systems of faith and worship which have been developed in pure philosophy and poetry; but, letting down His wings, the

Angel of the Covenant stands on His feet on the grounds of the truly human, sensible, and verifiable.

The mysticism that drops the fact is not the mysticism of the New Testament. It will be generally agreed that St. John is the ideal mystic. He possessed to perfection the peculiar genius of the mystic, never being content until he had looked upon a truth in the light of idealism, and had chased it right away into the infinite azure. He is the eagle of the apostles; his wings scale the heights of sublimest speculation, his eyes gaze upon the sun. Yet he never lets go of the fact. In the opening of his Gospel we are at once immersed in clouds of mystic glory; but not for a moment are we permitted to lose sight of material actuality. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." His First Epistle strikes the same note: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life." Nothing here is vaporous, intangible, elusive. The mighty corona of mystery girdling the Sun of Righteousness had a special fascination for the beloved disciple; but he never forgets the globular mass at the centre. This is the true Christian mysticism—the appreciation of fact whose implications defy definition.

To-day, however, a given school first regards the great verities of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection as fables, and then proceeds to treat the fictions as suggestive symbols of essential truth. We may spiritualize facts, hardly myths. A while ago a traveller succeeded in taking the photograph of a mirage. Shadow of a shade ! So the new theologian requires that we accept the facts of the Gospel as myths, and then he invites us to spiritualize the myth. A still thinner shadow of a still thinner shade ! The Church of Christ does not offer to mankind these miserable attenuations. The sins, sufferings, and sorrows, the needs, hopes, and fears of the race are real, tremendously real, insistent facts of consciousness ; and they are not to be met by baseless abstractions. We need realities to meet realities, and we have them. The New Testament is not a collection of photographed mirages ; it is a record of glorious facts photographed in their own light, and appealing to the consciousness as our sins and sorrows do. We do not tantalize with vapours a world perishing of thirst ; but the smitten rock of Calvary sends forth a tide of living waters of which if a man drink he shall never thirst again.

II. THE GRAND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EVANGELICAL MESSAGE. Note :

1. The *fullness* of the blessing. "A river." Not a pool, cistern, or rivulet, but a free, full, flowing stream. The idea is that of sufficiency,

plenitude. Before Christ came there had been brooks and reservoirs—there are such still outside His palpable sphere of influence; but the distinctive note of the Christian faith is that of adequacy, abundance, completeness. “Fullness” is one of the most conspicuous words of the New Testament. Whatever Christ does for us is done amply, effectually, overflowing. Herein lies one aspect of the glorious singularity of the Christian faith—its fullness and efficacy of blessing.

Fullness of *truth*. The knowledge of salvation in Christ is so complete that nothing need be added to it; it is so complete that nothing can be added to it except to our detriment. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews sets forth this fact in the front of his great argument—the contrast between the “divers portions” and the all-comprehending truth. In past ages partial illuminations were vouchsafed; but the whole essential, final truth touching our eternal redemption has been revealed in Christ. Science tells us that the highly refractive power of the diamond throws back the light that falls on it, instead of allowing the rays to pass through it, as glass does. It is this property that causes the gem to sparkle in the dark. In the deepest darkness there are always some wandering rays—some stray pencils of light to render the darkness visible; and these, how few or small soever, the diamond collects to a point and flashes back into the gloom. Abraham, Moses, David, the Hebrew prophets, Mel-

chizedek and Job, great teachers in Persia, India, Mexico, China, Arabia, Japan, Greece, and other regions, were diamond souls, who in the darkness that covered the earth caught the wandering rays of the light that lighteth every man coming into the world, and flashed them back with greater or less lustre upon the eyes of those who were feeling after God and the way to Him. But the most magical diamonds, even if their splendour justifies the fables of *The Arabian Nights*, are as nothing compared with the golden glory of the morning ; and the truths and half-truths, the foregleams of pre-Christian ages, are swallowed up in the perfect light of Him who is Truth itself. We need not go outside the New Testament for saving knowledge. "I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden."

Fullness of *grace*. Plenitude of love, strength, comfort, peace, and hope is ours in the knowledge and fellowship of Jesus Christ. His Gospel is "the Gospel of grace." It brings a love that leaves no room for suspicion, a strength that allows no excuse for weakness, a purity whiter than any fuller on earth can whiten, a hope so full and assured that it brands doubt as sin. The fullness of *saving* grace. The good tidings of

Christ breathe infinite pity, they promise ample forgiveness, and inspire hope in despair itself. The guilty soul is given a chance, every soul a chance, the most deeply lost a chance. It is just what the sinner wants ; it is immeasurably beyond what he could expect. No larger, freer, more effectual message of salvation is conceivable. Were heaven to give us another Gospel, it could not be a better. The fullness of *sanctifying* grace. The river is "bright as crystal" ; and if we will only allow it to flow through us freely, it will cleanse and hallow every thought, passion, principle, and instinct of our nature, making our whole being bright as crystal.

The fullness of *satisfying* grace, the grace that brings its own evidence. Revelation gives us no mean interpretation of ourselves. Unlike a sceptical secularism, it honours human nature, magnifies it wonderfully. "What vast horizons I could paint now !" exclaimed the dying Corot ; but revelation always paints vast horizons concerning our nature and destiny. And in Christ Jesus every possibility is met and satisfied. Recently we noticed in a gentleman's grounds a tame sea-gull paddling in a dish, and picking whatever morsels it might find. It seemed almost profane to clip the wings of the bird of sky, sea, and storm, and doom it to a pie-dish ! But that gull was simply majestic, and its sphere immense, compared with the secularist who degrades himself to the sordid fate of "What shall we eat ? what shall we drink ?



and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The Gospel of Christ honours our whole vast, complex being, and satisfies our instinct for God, righteousness, and immortality. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

The great thing to be remembered in this day is that the whole question of salvation is between us and Christ. He alone paid the price of our redemption, He alone is competent to deliver and perfect. Whatever was lost is restored in Him, and we are complete in Him. This is the view that St. Paul so passionately enforced in the primitive Church, and it is the vital truth to be insisted upon to-day. "This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech." A legend of the Jews accounts for the existence of jewels. It relates that in paradise was a temple built of mighty blocks of precious stone. Within it were pillared halls and cloisters of emerald and pearl, and above it domes of sapphire blazed in the sunlight. In this temple our first parents worshipped. On the day, however, on which they sinned the superb shrine was shattered into a million fragments which were sown broadcast over the earth: the emeralds, sapphires, and rubies we find to-day being the relics of the primitive sanctuary. This is the wild setting of a sober fact. Through passion, ignorance, and disobedience the temple of

truth has been shattered, and its precious fragments are found in all creeds and philosophies, "with rubbish mixed and glittering in the dust." But on the day that the Lord Jesus Christ stood forth, announcing to a distraught world, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life," the lost temple was recovered, in more than fabled splendour, let down out of heaven from God. In the excelling knowledge of Christ Jesus we find the truth, peace, perfection, and infinite hope which complete the soul. Every essential thing is here.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,  
More than all in Thee I find !

2. The *purity* of the river recalls the holiness of the Gospel. "It gleamed like crystal." Where else shall we find such unsullied lustre, such flashing purity as we see in the revelation whose substance is Christ ! The Hindu regards with profoundest reverence his sacred river Ganges, believing that it takes its rise in paradise, and that its waters are incorruptible. Macaulay, however, tells how when a devotee was shown a drop of the sacred stream under the microscope, it was seen to swarm with pollution. Is not this incident a parable of the faiths of these Oriental peoples ? Their most sacred things are infected with uncleanness. Alongside of fine truths, their Scriptures contain pestilent errors. The temples in which they worship are foul with ghastly idols. Their moral codes permit and enjoin grievous immorali-

ties. Their systems of faith and worship must not be subjected to the microscope. The Christian faith will bear the microscope! The river gleams all the more under the searching glass and the concentrated beam.

Take the Christian doctrine of God. Recall the gods of paganism—lustful, capricious, brutal, bloody; and then, if it be lawful to speak of the two things in the same breath, think of the Holy One of Israel as revealed in the Lord Jesus! The Lord God is a sun whose pure splendour His people often darkened by the intervention of their frailties and faults; yet in the Old Testament His moral glory, shining through all the clouds and eclipses created by human ignorance and sin, contrasted marvellously with the stained idols of the nations surrounding Israel. And the whole breadth of the heavens comes between the pantheon of paganism and Him who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all. Strange, indeed, how this conception of a Deity of absolute purity arose in the human mind! Search the great white throne with the microscope, and know it spotless. It has been affirmed that the Deity of a people is always a reflection of themselves; but the God of revelation is no reflection of ourselves. Humboldt writes concerning the black rivers of the Orinoco, "These black streams reflect the images of the southern stars with the most remarkable clearness." Yet no one supposes that the heavens are indebted for their splendour to the dark stream

that reflects them. Nor can we believe that the pure Deity who confronts us in revelation is in anywise the creation of an imperfect humanity. The thought of a God glorious in holiness could come only from Himself—the river flows from the throne.

Our Master has been searched through the microscope by unsparing eyes, with the result that the critics are more nearly unanimous concerning His perfection than they are agreed on any other subject whatever. As the ages pass, His divine greatness and righteousness more and more impress the consciousness of the race. A pupil of Corot copied one of his pictures so faithfully that an accidental spot of glue upon the master's canvas was reproduced. "Ah!" responded Corot, "look as carefully at Nature, and you will find her without stain." May we not truly affirm that if we take the greatest and best of men as a pattern, and closely imitate them throughout, we shall repeat some spot or stain; but if we look carefully at the Lord Jesus and severely follow the ideal, we shall find Him without fault? Ah! and we shall be found faultless also. There is a perfection here beyond that found by the student in nature. Our Master is purer than the dew, whiter than the snow, lovelier than the rainbow, sweeter than the rose. The sinlessness of Jesus is the endless delight of His people, the persistent problem of His foes.

Put the ethics of Christianity under the micro-

scope, they will bide the test. The severest ordeal has not to this hour discredited the Words of Sinai or the Sermon on the Mount. Scientists celebrate the skill of the Belgian chemist who eliminated from his chemicals every trace of that pervasive element, sodium, so thoroughly, that even its spectroscopic detection was impossible; but far more wonderful is that code of righteousness given in revelation, embodied in Jesus Christ, in which the sternest critics fail to discern the subtlest trace of error or injustice. It approaches the amusing, as nearly as the serious nature of the subject will admit, to watch the ingenuities by which sceptical and utilitarian moralists attempt to invalidate the divine system of character and duty established by our Lord and Master. Sometimes they demur to it as excessive; on other occasions they presume to transcend it; and their latest champion, as though in final despair of being able to damage its authority, transports us into a strange sphere "beyond good and evil." Time begins to make clearer to us the bold words of our Lord, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Subject the celestial world of the Christian faith to the most rigid examination, and confess its matchless purity and delight. The paradise of Mohammed is the harem *in excelsis*; the world of glory discovered by Christ is holiness itself. The state of final felicity on which He fixes our faith does not appeal to the imagination, much less to

our appetites, but simply and powerfully to the conscience. Never once do the sacred writers seek to dazzle our imagination or to excite our passions ; everywhere, and always, are we steeped in an atmosphere of intense purity. The foundations of the city being precious stones, the streets gold, the gates pearl, the garments white, the light like unto jasper, the river gleaming like crystal—all symbolize the truth that the New Jerusalem is founded, guarded, and illuminated in righteousness ; that the everlasting source of its preciousness, delectableness, and beauty is the fact that it so perfectly mirrors the holiness of the throne of God and the Lamb which is its centre and glory.

Nothing that we know is really so wonderful as this river of water of life clear as crystal. Our age has heard so much of the defects of revelation, the doctrines of our faith have been so unsympathetically discussed, that we might easily conclude that we had to do with some ancient foul drain that it would be well to arch over and forget ; whilst, in very truth, the depth of the purity of the river, impartially considered, is the miracle of miracles. That the sacred tide is sometimes discoloured by the channels through which it flows, that chips and straws are borne on its surface, that weeds may mix with it here and there, is no matter for surprise ; the standing wonder is the great luminous river whose sands are gold, whose depths glass the purity of the heavens,



and whose virtues give health and life to the nations. This is the marvel, this the main feature on which sincere men will rivet their attention, that such a silver current of awful purity should flow through a world like this. The truth and grace in Christ Jesus have no terrestrial origin; only a river flowing from the eternal hills could be thus pure.

3. The *vitality* of the river suggests the living power of the Christian faith. "A river of water of life," one that clothes with beauty and fruitfulness whatever it touches. The Oriental has a keen appreciation of the magical virtue of water. He discerns a flower in every dewdrop, a harvest in the passing shower, a whole paradise in the tiniest rill sparkling from the spring. So the Old Testament recognized the mysterious power of the divine grace to revive the soul and fill it with delight. "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in dry places, and make strong thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." But this figure of the prophet touching the vitalizing of the soul is immensely enlarged and enriched in the New Testament. There comes to the believer in Christ not merely the kindling of thought, the freshening of feeling, the invigoration of principle and purpose, that always accompany contact with new truth; but also the very principle of divine life is established in the soul, welling up, streaming forth, in abounding peace and love,

joy and hope. He who came that we might have life and have it more abundantly has effected a vast change in human experience concerning all that is understood by spiritual life—the “mist” of refreshment granted the fathers has given place to a “river out of Eden that waters the garden.” “For of His fullness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” And what all this means in character and experience is amply declared in the Epistles, where grace crowds grace in rarest perfection. Travellers tell of landscapes where violets grow to be trees; and some such transformation and enhancement, only infinitely more rich and strange, has passed over all the graces since the eternal fountain of love and life was unsealed in Christ Jesus.

The faith of Christ vivifies all civilization. “And on this side of the river, and on that, was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month.” Whatever belongs to the completeness of social, civic, and imperial life is secured through the action of the Gospel. The faith of Jesus energizes the whole range of human interests, relationships, and delights. It also renders all precious things perennial and permanent. As in prolific regions ripe fruit and fresh-blown blossoms may be seen upon a single branch of apple- or orange-tree, so a civilization instinct with the Christian spirit is at once full of matured blessings and rich in aspiration and promise. The

ideal civilization has not yet been reached because the spirit of Christ has not yet been transfused through national life. Whenever that shall once be, there shall be glory, honour, and peace, everywhere, always, evermore.

Christ gives life to the world. "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Sometimes a river makes a city, as the Abana Damascus; or it enriches a country, as the Nile Egypt; or it vitalizes a continent, as the Amazon South America. But the mystic river we celebrate gives life to a world. We venture to declare that all the manifold race needs is in the faith of Christ, and that the highest duty of Christian men is to publish and apply that faith. As the river that went out of Eden "parted, and became into four heads," so the river gushing from the mediatorial throne flows east and west, north and south, cleansing and fertilizing the whole earth. We do not need some extraordinary intervention of heaven to bring in the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness, and for whose coming we cry day and night; the sufficient, sovereign virtue resides in the river which makes glad the City of our God. Geologists find the presence of tropical species in latitudes now subjected to the rigours of a cold climate, and arctic forms in regions at present belonging to the temperate zone. In endeavouring to explain these anomalies of climate, scientists in past days went in search of vast cosmic changes, such as an alteration in the position of the terres-

trial axis, a diminution in the amount of solar heat, or a gradual cooling of the earth's crust ; but modern scientists are satisfied to explain these climatic conditions as the result of a familiar agency close at hand, and of which we have daily experience. A genial current of water or air deflected towards our coast is, in their opinion, sufficiently powerful to create the difference of temperature which rescues us from the rigours of Lapland and fills our island with summer's pageantry and autumn's pride. So to give the nations of the earth a sweet summer for the long dark winter of their discontent, we need not invoke the personal reign of the Lord Jesus or some other extraordinary interposition of heaven. In that stream of Shiloah which flows softly through our sanctuaries, schools, and homes, rejoicing us with heavenly fruits and flowers, we see the divinely appointed and adequate agency for converting the earth into a garden of God. All we need do is to share with the nations the living current warmed by the Sun of Righteousness, and "on this side of the river, and on that," shall bloom the tree of life.

### III

#### SUPPRESSED DISCIPLESHIP

*And after these things Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came, therefore, and took away His body. And there came also Nicodemus, he who at the first came to Him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight.—JOHN xix. 38, 39.*

JOSEPH and Nicodemus occupy a singular position in relation to our Lord. Throughout the evangelical narrative they flit in the background, and nothing more is known of them beyond these rare appearances. They cannot be ranked with the acknowledged disciples of our Lord, and yet they were in some sense His followers. For all time they represent ambiguous, unsatisfactory discipleship.

I. THE REALITY OF THIS DISCIPLESHIP must be allowed. To condemn these furtive disciples sharply and indiscriminatingly, and to dismiss them with a feeling akin to contempt, is to miss most instructive teaching. Nor should they be thus dismissed. The text speaks of Joseph as being "a disciple of Jesus," and we can therefore scarcely do less. Whatever his timidity, there was in him a core of sincerity. He was "a councillor of honourable estate," who, as Mark testifies, was

“looking for the kingdom of God.” When the Sanhedrin condemned our Lord, Joseph “did not consent to their counsel and deed.” And, as we learn from Luke, after the crucifixion he “went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus,” burying it in a select tomb. The high character of Joseph must be admitted, and the genuineness of his admiration for our Lord. The same concession must be made with regard to Nicodemus. He was of unquestionably pure character. At the opening of our Lord’s ministry he appears as a truth-seeker, and as one who recognized in the Master a teacher sent from God. In the assembly of the Pharisees he pleaded that justice might be done the outraged Christ. And in the final scene we behold him doing reverence to the body of the Crucified. We may not superciliously dismiss these followers of the Lord, and assume to exclude them from the circle of His disciples.

Is there not reason to believe that some to-day occupy the position of these undeclared disciples of our text? They fail to come into the open, they decline to identify themselves with Christ’s Church; yet so much about them is good and godly that none would dispute their claim to discipleship if they would only make it. Nothing is amiss on the score of character, they betray spiritual sympathies and aspirations, furtively they befriend the cause of Christ; still, they hesitate to declare themselves on His side. Often by the purest accident their reserve is infringed and their



best self disclosed. Recently we saw a flashlight photograph of the night-blooming cereus. This plant grows freely in South Africa, and attains uncommon beauty, its flowers being from six to eight inches in height and width. But, as its name implies, the plant in question is at its best in the night and blossoms in the darkness. In this instance, however, the photographer surprised it by the flashlight, and with his camera took its picture. We believe that God has many night-flowering plants in His garden; and often it is only by the veriest chance that we get a glimpse of them.

Sometimes the revealing gleam lights upon them whilst they are yet alive and in our midst. A singular and unexpected combination of circumstances forces them into view, and assures the spectators concerning the reality of their Christian character. Most of us can recall occasions when persons, whom we thought we knew perfectly, startled us by the revelation of unsuspected qualities and tempers; and it is pleasant to remember how certain of our acquaintances have delighted us by unlooked-for manifestations of Christian feeling and loyalty. For the time at least the white flower has glowed in the white light. Now and then the revelation follows the passing away of the undemonstrative. A diary, perhaps, tells the tale of secretive piety; or it is disclosed by some other indubitable sign. In a church with which we are familiar a gentleman

worshipped who could never be persuaded to identify himself with us in any public way. Abnormally retiring, he merged himself in the great congregation ; he was not numbered with the sacramental host, and few would have supposed him a subject of special religious experiences. After his death his private Bible, full of the marks of a constant and sympathetic student, revealed the truth : the lessons of the sacred page had been learned, its precious truths pondered, its promises appropriated, its vast hopes shared. The underscored book was a flashlight making manifest a secret flower which we fully believe blooms in the paradise of God.

There are rigid saints who contend for *The Visible Church and no Invisible Members* ; but it is impossible to admit their assumption. We may sadly allow that there are those in the Church who are not of it ; they stand on its roll without revealing its truth and purity : yet, on the other side, many beyond our pale really belong to us ; they are one with us in faith and holiness. The Master has sheep which are not of the visible fold ; them also will He bring, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd. God knows silent and hidden disciples who are yet real ones. As superb flowers are concealed in dark forests, as the violet is hidden in the prairie grass, as the rose wastes its sweetness on the desert air ; so genuinely devout men and women are lost to us as, for various reasons, they permit themselves to be con-

founded with the weeds and briars of the wilderness.

Would it not be better generally if the Church of God more readily recognized the best side of doubtful persons? We are apt to be exacting, to insist on sharp lines and definitions, to reject with disdain whatever appears irresolute or half-and-half. It was not so with our Master. Nothing is more remarkable about the Perfect One than the way in which He accepted weak faith, mixed motives, hesitating loyalty, a cobweb attachment to Himself, for all that they were worth. He had no sympathy with that fierceness of orthodoxy and virtue which scornfully spurns vacillation and inadequacy. Wherever a gleam of promise met His eye it aroused His pity and expectation—in a grain of gold-dust lying on the surface He seemed ever to apprehend the gold-field of rich possibilities lying below. A “bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory.” His tenderness towards the faintest upward-seeking desire is the secret of His drawing and saving power through the generations. Thus He kindles sparks into seraphs, and transforms reeds shaken by the wind into pillars of the heavenly palace which go out no more. Surely it would be well were His Church quicker to discern and welcome all who follow at a distance, yet in whom is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

II. THE UNSATISFACTORINESS OF SUPPRESSED DISCIPLESHIP. Whatever may be said in favour of the sequestered disciple partakes at last of the nature of apology. It is impossible that it should be eulogy. The most skillful advocate is felt to be dealing with the excuse that is so nigh to accusation. The evangelists content themselves with stating the bare fact concerning the dubious disciples; no estimate of them is attempted, no justification or condemnation is pronounced upon these unconfessed attachments; we are left with the naked record, however it may be interpreted. Yet, according to Dumas, "silence is an opinion"; and in this place silence cannot be construed into sanction. Nicodemus "came to Jesus by night"; and as he came in the darkness, so with his equivocal brother he departs in it. The ambiguous pair are set forth as admonitory enigmas, not as examples. Let the judgment of charity be what it may, we are perfectly sure that hidden discipleship is not the ideal Christian discipleship. We may on occasion leave it hopefully with God, but we cannot believe it is designed for imitation. Let us indicate several points of its defectiveness.

I. *It denies the instinct of the Christian heart.* The first impulse of a true heart is a ready recognition of any boon that has been received and a loving acknowledgment of the giver. The first impulse of the heart that has been drawn by Christ and blessed by Him is to avow Him. Having seen His beauty, proved His merit, tasted

His sweetness and peace, the pure, spontaneous response of the soul is acknowledgment and worship. The two opaque brethren did violence to the finest instinct of their nature, and allowed rich opportunities to pass without any expression of their love and loyalty, or, at most, with only faint demonstrations of faith and affection. They stifled noble feeling, and reserved themselves like disciples of the necropolis. We are justly dissatisfied with those who neglect their friends whilst living, and then demonstrate their affection in the churchyard with a profusion of flowers and eulogies. Costly tombs, flattering epitaphs, and gorgeous wreaths have their place and signification; but no homage to the dead can atone for the lack of love and loyalty to the living. We must breathe our love into the listening ear, and not tell it into the dull, cold ear of death; our friends long to taste the sweetness of affection whilst yet by our side, we must not keep all the spices for their burial. Flowers are more delightful scattered on the pathway of the living than garnishing the graves of the dead.

It is a grievous mistake to smother the suggestions of the heart, to silence the words of love which spring to the lips, to deny ourselves and our kindred the expression of admiration, sympathy, and affection. They who fail to tell their love to Christ, and who withhold from Him the tokens of allegiance and devotion, exhibit this fault in its saddest and guiltiest form; they do

their worst towards quenching the sublimest passion which can glow in the human heart, and on whose pure flame depends the mightiest consequences. Great and inevitable, indeed, is the revenge of the wronged instinct. Joseph consecrated for Jesus a special tomb; yet Joseph will never rank with John, who continued with the Master in His temptations, who leaned upon His breast, shared His sorrows, and stood by His cross. Nicodemus, as though conscious that he had serious arrears to make up, brought a hundred pounds' weight of spices to embalm the sacred body; yet will he never rank with Mary, who before the whole company broke the box of spikenard on the head and feet of her living, loving Lord. The true Christian heart, here and now, aches to voice its love and joy; and to choke its utterance, to deny its testimony and service, is to quench the Spirit, or at the best to leave a few fading sparks of what ought to be a quenchless fire.

2. *Reserve is contrary to the genius of the Christian faith.* Testimony is of the essence of the Christian faith. Before Pilate our Lord certified concerning Himself, "To this end have I been born, and to this end have I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." His whole mission is here made manifest. He did not appear among us as a solitary thinker, a devout recluse, intent on personal and selfish enjoyment of sublime thoughts and emotions; He came



as a messenger, a herald, a witness, to declare and attest eternal truths, which testimony He finally sealed with His blood. Our Lord showed Himself openly ; His sermons were not unspoken, but from a mountain pulpit their sound went forth into all the world ; and if His ministry knew hours of silence, they were like the silences of heaven, only to make His vast music vaster. His life throughout was a revelation of the unseen and eternal ; His ministry a proclamation of the divine truth and mercy ; and His passion, crucifixion, and resurrection were not things done in a corner.

Thus, in turn, are His disciples to be witnesses also ; they are to set their endorsement and seal to the Gospel of our salvation. To the vast majority of those whom He blesses the Master says, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He hath had compassion on thee." The few are chosen vessels to bear His name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. The Christian faith knows no freemasonry ; it is a truth and an experience, to be testified to by all who believe. The Oriental satirically notes that "the light of the firefly is sufficient for itself only" : be sure that the light of Christ's disciples is not a twinkle after this order—a sickly, solitary, selfish lustre. "Ye are the light of the world." That the Master may be glorified, and His cause duly served, the disciple must be prepared courageously and confidently to give a reason for the

hope that is in him to every man. The hidden disciple fails to fulfill that social duty which is so large a part of Christian duty.

The value of personal testimony is immense. To defend the Gospel in controversy is congenial to most Christians; it calls our combative instincts into play, and to debate Christian doctrine in the abstract is an intellectual exercise that implies nothing difficult nor distasteful; but to bear personal testimony, to declare what we have felt and seen, to set to our seal that God is true, is often a task calling for courage and sacrifice. Yet such witness is of infinitely more value than all our scholarship and cleverness of argument. And this applies to the testimony of the humblest believer. Michael Faraday, that consummate scientist, was wont to pay special attention to the observations of comparatively untrained but practical workmen. They are accustomed to a minute observation of what passes before them, and their witness to facts and experience Faraday considered of true and high importance to the philosopher. Is not the experience of the humblest individual in the things of the Spirit of true and high importance? It certainly is, and is acknowledged as such by every dispassionate man. Christ is supported by a host of eloquent and logical witnesses, but His most convincing witness is the man who was born blind. "Whether He be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

3. *This suppression impairs the development of the Christian character.* The unhindered manifestation of the spiritual life is the condition of its normal growth. Here many demur, "Seeing the root of the matter is found in me, why trouble further? Surely the main thing is the reality of the Christian life, and not its profession!" Thus believing, men are tempted to think that the free expression of their conviction and sympathy is a question of comparative indifference. Such a conclusion is a serious misconception. It is of vital consequence that the root of the matter is found in us—nothing can be done without that; but, after all, this is only half the problem. Luther Burbank, the Californian horticulturist, writes, "The fact is too often lost sight of, or not known at all, that the tops of the trees absolutely govern the roots";<sup>1</sup> and he proceeds to show that the leaves are of prime importance because in them the food of the tree, in condensed air and sunshine, is made accessible to the tree as a whole. If a tree be rich in foliage, it will be powerful in all its parts, because it has the capacity to take so much nourishment from the air and light. It is thus with Christian character; every point of its self-revelation becomes in turn a source of health and energy. The free manifestation of the spiritual life is essential to its vigour and fullness; far-away branches clothing themselves with foliage, bursting into blossom, bending with clusters, absolutely govern

<sup>1</sup> *New Creations in Plant Life.*

the roots, and determine the depth and strength of the whole character.

If the exfoliation of the tree is hindered, its entire aspect is injured ; and in spirit and life we suffer inevitably and seriously whenever we venture to check the motions and outgoings of the divine life. Unspoken love waxes cold ; faith fails when denied the consummation of action ; dumb experience is not sure of itself for long ; joy forbidden to sing dies in its cage ; loyalty concealing the flag is on the verge of desertion. We cannot deny free course to our great convictions and preferences without suffering capital loss, as a flower might be poisoned by the suppression of its colour or the retention of its fragrance. He who does not frankly and freely honour the Master in word and deed starves the soul and kills character in its very roots.

We cannot conceal from ourselves the serious consequences which must follow the shutting down of our religious life from the atmosphere of publicity. Our soul is full of spiritual ideas, instincts, affinities, and possibilities ; but to develop, maintain, and mature these, the unchecked action of society upon us is as necessary as the unhindered stimuli of light, air, and rain to which plants respond. We can no more shut up our spiritual life to silence, darkness, insulation, and expect it to grow and ripen, than we can hope to see a bulb in a closet break into sweet flower and ruddy fruit. Our religion is, indeed, a thing between God and

our own soul ; but it is also a thing between us and society, and to attempt to isolate and secrete it is to deprive it of a thousand influences and excitements essential to its perfection.

III. THE FRANK, OUTSPOKEN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE MASTER is the obvious duty of every disciple, and to this we would exhort you. What reason can we give for this repression and restraint? Is any reason sufficient for such a habit?

Does *constitutional sensitiveness* constrain to silence and secrecy? Some persons are constitutionally reserved, and are ever in the background, whatever may be the sphere in which they are called to live and act. Not that all suffer from this cause; most are known for what they are worth, and occasionally, perhaps, some for more; yet others are incurably supersensitive, and their temperament qualifies their religious life. As Shelley sings:

The Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;  
Radiancy and odour are not its dower.

Not infrequently rare characters amongst men as little challenge attention. If, then, our attachment to Christ involves the sacrifice of sensibility, let us for His sake make it. It is a sacrifice He understands and appreciates. "And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered into a house, and would have no man know it: but He could not be hid." Here

we behold the working of the sensitiveness of a great soul, the longing for privacy, the sighing for aloofness from the eyes and tongues of the public. "But straightway a woman whose little daughter" was afflicted urged the Saviour back into the unwelcome glare. He makes the sacrifice of sensibility for the glory of God and the blessing of human kind. Let all who are thus perplexed imitate the Master's example ; compelled by the love of God and man, dare the limelight, and you shall be greatly strengthened to bear and forget it.

Does *the fear of man* render us mute and invisible ? " Being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews." And to-day many are intimidated by fear of the Gentiles. In nature a law obtains that is known as the law of " protective resemblance." Insects, birds, and animals become in colour assimilated to their environment, and acquire characters which do not properly belong to them, so that they may escape the attentions of their enemies. Joseph and Nicodemus had assimilated themselves to their environment, assumed characters which were not truly theirs, affected to believe and act as their compeers did, that they might find immunity from criticism and hostility. So thousands act to-day. Timid believers veil and distort themselves, they simulate opinions and habits with which they have little sympathy, they permit their neighbours to think otherwise of them than they truly are, they wear characters which do not express their truest and



noblest self ; as a matter of protective policy, they disguise their convictions and sympathies. Pathetic hypocrisy, to counterfeit the features of ignoble life, to mask by base manœuvre the truth and beauty of the soul !

Let me commend a worthier policy. As nature protects some plants and animals by mimicry, it secures others by lavishing upon them splendid and conspicuous colour. Predatory creatures are warned off by the striking or gorgeous hues of flower, bird, or butterfly ; the vivid markings and coloration tell the beasts of prey that the lovely things will not be found to their taste. This is the secret of absolute safety for the spiritual life. No immunity equals that of strong, pure, beautiful, declared Christian character. Let the colours of heaven shine forth, the characters of grace freely express themselves, the great beliefs of the soul speak out without fear, and none shall make you afraid. Sincerity is the synonym for safety. "No man is of any use until he has dared everything," says Louis Stevenson ; and he who has dared everything for a sublime faith is henceforth afraid of nothing. "For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline."

Do considerations of *worldly interest* prompt our seclusion ? "Nevertheless, even of the rulers many believed on Him ; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue : for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God." Cal-

culations of interest and honour pervert the soul, and frustrate purposes of the greatest pith and moment. It is not unfair to suppose that Joseph and Nicodemus felt the force of these sinister considerations. Do similarly unworthy thoughts check the current of our soul? Our discipleship is ambiguous, indeed, whilst we cast one downward glance at the dust and baubles and feathers of time and sense. Moses counted the reproach of the Christ beyond all the treasures of Egypt, and never again once sighed for them. Paul counted all things to be loss for Christ, and never speaks of the great renunciation with any regret; the whole glittering heap of gains he counted refuse. This is the ideal discipleship. The life in Christ is so overwhelmingly rich and blessed, the treasures of grace and the hope of glory are so infinite, that all this world can give is not worthy of a thought if it come into competition with the great experiences of the saintly soul. Let no trimming with terrestrial interests and ambitions beguile us into doing dishonour to our Master and injustice to ourselves.

Does *intellectual vanity* prevail to render our Christian life secret and cloistered? When Nicodemus pleaded with the Jewish authorities that our Lord should be heard before He was condemned, the Pharisees retorted, "Art thou also of Galilee?" The Galilean was the plebian, the rustic, the illiterate. The magistrates appealed to Nicodemus as a man of position and culture, and

apparently he shrank from the odium of being accounted a Galilean. This test was too severe. The ruler of the Jews could have borne any opposition better than that his intellectual rank should be reflected upon; the dread of this reduced him to silence. Many secretly persuaded disciples to-day fail when subjected to this ordeal. The Christian name in certain quarters is a synonym for narrowness, superstition, fanaticism, hypocrisy; whilst, on the other hand, the enemies of the faith are the illuminated, the rational, the liberal, the emancipated: and these, by virtue of their assumed superiority, regard with superciliousness any who humbly believe in Christ as He is, and in revelation in the sense in which it was written. Many mistaken souls cannot tolerate this reflection on their social and intellectual pride, "Art thou also of Galilee?" Which sneer is equivalent to saying, "The simple faith of the Gospel may be good enough for the man in the street, but we expect something different and better from readers and scholars, from men who are acquainted with the Higher Criticism and the New Theology; it is a degradation for such to identify themselves with the company of ordinary believers." In answer to all this, let us remind ourselves that we have nothing to blush for in the Lord Jesus, in His Gospel, or in His cause. Strange, indeed, that we should be ashamed of avowing Him as "our wisdom, righteousness, and redemption"! St. Paul writes of a strange thing when he tells of

those "who glory in their shame"; but is it less monstrous that any should be ashamed of their glory? "Be not ashamed, therefore, of the testimony of our Lord: but suffer hardship with the Gospel according to the power of God."

The temptation is great to-day to follow the device of Joseph and Nicodemus. To make our faith a matter of subjective consciousness, and to fight shy of anything that savours of out-and-out discipleship, is thought by many to be a sign of rare refinement and humility. This is a subtle error, all the greater for its subtlety. We do not acknowledge Christ for our own glory, but for His. "I pray not for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me"; "I am glorified in them." Let Him be glorified in us, both by our lips and lives. Not that we are to make any feigned, coerced demonstrations of Christian faith and feeling, to act in excess of our sincerity; but to give free course to our highest convictions and emotions, and out of the abundance of our heart to permit the mouth to testify. Thus confess Him before society; confess Him as your peace, strength, hope, and glory. Let men take knowledge of you from the fact that you are found where the disciples resort together, that you are warm in Christ's cause, that you are habitually at His table, that your joy is in His fellowship. Leave Joseph and Nicodemus to the compassion of their slighted Master; take your stand with apostles, martyrs, and confessors. Christ's cause

never needed bold outspoken witnesses more than now. Let us heed the warning of Ruskin, that "our shamefacedness be not such as may at last put us among those of whom the Son of Man shall be ashamed."

## IV

### THE DIVINE COERCION OF EVIL

*Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.*—Ps. lxxvi. 10.

AS the Assyrian army compassed Jerusalem, threatening it with swift and overwhelming destruction, so the alien armies of evil workers appear formidable to the Church of Christ in our own day. No worker for God and humanity but must often stand dismayed before the pride and power of evil. Zion, with her slight external resources, seemed not less than contemptible matched against the world-power of Sennacherib; and the Zion of this generation appears utterly inadequate to cope with the arrogant wickedness of beleaguering hosts. The principle of lawlessness and destructiveness working in the world is appalling and ominous beyond exaggeration. Its manifoldness surprises us. It envelops, attacks, and torments us on every side. Practically the evils which afflict the world appear infinite and overwhelming. Its pervasiveness creates in us the sense of helplessness and hopelessness. It penetrates everywhere; it defiles everything. "And he opened the pit of the abyss, and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a



great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth." And these locusts swarm on the roses of our pleasure, devour the golden fruits of our industry, strip the vine and fig-tree of our domestic felicity, scorch the lovely acanthus leaf of art, defile the pomegranates and palms of our sacred places, blight and blacken the whole human landscape. Evil, too, works with such energy and fatal facility of destructiveness. It requires centuries to fashion an oak, whilst a lightning-flash blasts it in a moment; and in this phenomenon we may see, as in a mirror, the slow growth of the good and pure, the dread effectiveness of the wrath of men and demons. Yes; we often stand paralyzed in the presence of the many mighty, malign elements working in society. Immeasurable, unfathomable, unconquerable as these forces are, our opposition to them seems almost farcical. Scientists identify the evil principle with the cosmic force. Philosophers recognize in it the authority of necessity. Reformers become sceptical as they struggle against its sea-power. And even the believer in God is no stranger to the terrible chill of despondency and despair.

Scherer criticizes Milton's Satan as being contradictory and absurd. "How are we to comprehend an angel who enters on a conflict with God; that is to say, with a being whom he knows to be omnipotent? The idea of Satan is a contradictory

idea ; for it is contradictory to know God and yet attempt rivalry with Him." <sup>1</sup> Yet, judged from the *a priori* standpoint, Milton's creation is not improbable, nor his reasoning so transparently absurd. The position implied much more than a question of power. Satan's revolt ceases to look so desperate when we remember all the obligations and limitations of righteousness in the conflict, as contrasted with the absolute license of a vicious and an indomitable will. Wickedness is restrained by no law of truth, honour, right, or mercy. It possesses all the resources of sophistry, exercises all the arts of flattery, whilst all the glamour and hypnotism of sensationalism are at its beck. It plays off delirious delights against sobriety, jewelled pride against plain honesty, glittering success against chaste duty. It proffers all the prizes of life immediately and for an old song. It works in the dark. Nothing is sacred that stands in the way of its infectious nature, imperious will, and fierce propaganda. Surely the mighty experiment of the Satanic revolt was not without its fascination, possibility, and promise ! The history of centuries demonstrates the depth and power of the mystery of iniquity ; and the pessimism of the hour, despairing of final victory, confesses the strength and stratagem of the vast conspiracy against man and God : nay, pessimism holds that the demoniacal treason has been crowned with absolute success.

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on English Literature.*

Let us, then, note for our consolation and encouragement the two precious truths expressed by the text—the divine restraint of evil, and the divine compulsion of evil to issues of good and blessing. For, whatever the variations in the interpretation of the original by the great scholars, this is substantially the significance of the passage before us.

I. THE DIVINE RESTRAINT OF EVIL. “The remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.” The mighty army of Sennacherib, splendidly equipped, full of fury and confidence, suddenly and mysteriously melted away under the power of Jehovah, leaving Jerusalem intact and joyful; and the permanent significance of this event is, that no weapon formed against the kingdom of God shall finally prosper, that every conspiracy in a critical hour shall be brought to nought.

In nature we see abounding examples of the fact that limits are fixed to the destructive forces, limits they may not transgress. Geology shows how the terrible dragons of the primitive age were held in check, and finally eliminated. It might have been thought that these monsters, all teeth and claw, massive and heavily armoured, would have taken possession of the earth and retained possession. Yet they did not. Palæontology demonstrates that the best-armed species are those which have almost always disappeared. The stronger went to the wall. Sovereign laws and forces hedged in the formidable beasts, and secured the ascendancy and permanence of the

delicate but nobler types. The naturalist of to-day makes it clear that these benign laws and forces are still operative. Birds of blood infest the heavens, yet they fail to extirpate the sweet singers of the woods. In New Guinea is a venomous bird known as "the bird of death," whose bite causes excruciating suffering, blindness, lock-jaw, and death. How is it that this strong, fierce bird of evil has not multiplied, and taken possession of the forest? How is it that birds of paradise and a thousand more lovely avian forms manage to thrive by its side? or, to come nearer home, how is it that the swift, savage hawk does not exterminate the singers of our summers? The proverb confidently avouches that, "If the cat had wings, there would be no larks"; yet the hawk is a winged cat, and nevertheless the sky abides full of music.

The naturalist is familiar with a host of noxious plants which threaten the vegetable world, and put life in peril. The "devil-plant" of Mississippi destroys every bee and beast that touches it. The "death-plant" of Java is peculiarly fatal to all forms of insect life that come into contact with it. The "vampire-vine" of Nicaragua, otherwise called "the devil's snare," seems literally to drain the blood of every living thing that encounters it, and is hateful and horrible beyond description. In Natal is a loathsome murderous growth known as the "corpse-plant," which devours every living thing that lights upon it. And in our own

country are many species of plants fatal to animals and man. How is it that these pestilent growths, with all their vigour, fecundity, and aggressiveness, do not prevail? One of the old kings had his garden planted wholly of poison-flowers; how is it that the earth has not become such a garden? It has not; these foul and fearsome plants, despite all their advantages, continue local, and the landscape misses little of its glory. The fact is, there is a benign law, a delicately poised balance, a sovereign virtue, an anti-septic quality, in the very constitution of things, which keeps the destructive elements within bounds, and preserves the world a theatre of life, sweetness, health, and beauty. And as the snake is in the grass, the hawk in the sky, the poison-plant in the woods, so the octopus, alligator, and shark infest the waters; yet the protective law operates there also, sheltering whatsoever passeth through the depths of the seas.

The physiologist bears testimony to the same conservative law. It would seem reasonable to fear that diseases of the blood and brain would be transmitted, that they would accumulate from one generation to another, until the earth became a vast lazaretto; but, however imminent this disaster may seem, it does not occur. The student of heredity assures us "that there is a limit to the transmission of abnormal characteristics." Nature purifies the race of its physical defects, or, if the type be too vicious, exterminates it; so that the

degeneration of society cannot proceed beyond a given point. History insists on the same cheering fact. Pharaohs, Sennacheribs, Neroes, Attilas, Mohammeds, Tamerlanes, Alvas, Napoleons continually arise, putting the nations in fear, trampling them under foot, threatening civilization itself; yet history shows that there is always a rock on which their Armadas suffer shipwreck, some Moscow in which their armies perish.

Evil is full of boasting; it is insolent, mocking, rampant, apparently irresistible; it threatens to occupy the whole sphere—annihilating all that is good, soiling whatever is beautiful, quenching in darkness whatever is joyous; yet somehow it breaks off unaccountably where and when we did not expect it to break off, not having wrought nearly the mischief that seemed inevitable. “Fear ye not Me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at My presence which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and, though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?”

If in nature these gracious limits are imposed on the genius of destruction, let us be assured that stern circumscriptions restrain moral evil and render impossible its triumph. All about us in contemporaneous society are horrible things—infectious literature, vile institutions, degrading fashions, corrupting pleasures, iniquities framed by law, organizations, methods, habits, which eat as



doth a cancer. Selfish men, loose women, prey on their fellows at every corner. We need only to take up the morning paper and run our eye down its columns to become conscious of the working in society in every direction of the forces which poison and destroy. It often seems, to one who thoughtfully surveys the factors and workings of society, not less than a miracle that civilization continues to hold together, swarming as it does with malignant parasites. Yet the foes of the race do not prevail. Just as a secret law conditions the rattlesnake, the vampire, the devil-fish, and the upas-tree; so God's eye is upon the gin-saloon, the gutter-press, the gambling-den, the race-course, the camera obscura of lust, the prize-ring, the cabinet of the bloody men who delight in war, and all the rest of the brutal and devilish centres of the agencies and influences which afflict humanity. The proud, raging waves of willfulness and passion, foaming out their own shame, are broken on mystic sands fixed by heaven, and beyond which the powers of darkness may not go. So ethereal and palpable are these sands that it seems only poetry to speak of them; but their reality and efficacy are demonstrated in the persistence and progress of the race—though the waves toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over. "Who shut up the sea with doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" He who thus commands the Atlantic

and Pacific rebukes the troubled depths of evil as they fiercely rage, casting up mire and dirt.

The strangling creeper is hideous, yet the magnificence of the forest is unimpaired ; the leopard and wolf are swift and fierce, but innocent life feeds among the lilies and sings among the branches ; clouds of blight settle on the fields, still the golden corn feeds the world,—so God checkmates and controls the craft and rage of wickedness, lest the spirit of man should fail before Him, and the souls that He has made. He limits one bad thing by another, causes a lesser evil to control a greater, and imprisons the whole pandemonium of revolt within the golden ring of His absolute sovereignty.

II. THE DIVINE COMPULSION OF EVIL. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.” Not merely restrained, but coerced to most desirable issues. Not only is Zion saved from evil, she is served by it. The peoples of the earth, the estranged heathen peoples, through their defeats and humiliations, are to attain to true insight and reverence. The most furious and the most enraged are to come to the thankful acknowledgment of God. Such is the significance of the closing strophe of this psalm. The rage of kings and peoples is overruled to the glory of the Church of God and to the ultimate salvation of the revolters.

Let us, however, be clear as to what is exactly meant by evil working good. We must remember that evil is evil, not good in the making, not undeveloped good. Essential evil is the deliberate

contradiction of the divine will, the positive violation of the divine law, programme, design, the clash of God's will and the creature's. And, secondly, that good is never brought out of evil—that is impossible. When it is affirmed that evil works for good, we mean that God so antagonizes wicked men, vile institutions, and malign movements, that in the final result they develop the good they threaten to destroy. The selfishness, pride, and license of the world are made to work its purification.

History continually shows bad men serving high ends. This is the specific teaching of Pharaoh's record. "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee My power, and that My name might be published abroad in all the earth." The interpretation of which is, not that God made Pharaoh what he was, but, seeing what he was, what he had made himself, and how he had become a fanatical oppressor of Israel, God made use of him for the furtherance of a world-embracing scheme of redemption. Pharaoh became an unwilling and unconscious minister of God and humanity. Addressing his brethren, Joseph said: "As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." This was the truth on the inch-scale that is illustrated by Pharaoh on the wider scale of the world and the ages. Our

Henry VIII furnishes a modern illustration of the fact that personal wickedness may indirectly contribute to the public good ; that a bad man may become an eminent minister of civilization and progress. History teems with instances of the overruling of human wrath to human advantage ; but is not the supreme instance of this subordination recorded in the crucifixion of our Lord ? "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of wicked men did crucify and slay." Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, guilty of supreme wickedness, yet became ministers of grace, and the divine purpose of redemption was accomplished through their crimson crimes. We make ourselves whatever we are ; we do whatsoever we list ; but, after that, all become ministers of heaven's sovereign will : consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, white angels or black slaves, we alike execute the one eternal purpose of righteousness and love.

Ye are slaves unto *yourselves* —  
*Servants* of the mighty God.

Bad institutions work gracious effects. Important qualities and virtues are developed by military life, and in various ways war has proved a source of blessing ; not, however, because war is in any real sense good : it is a terrible evil overruled by heaven to ends of liberty and progress which ought to be attained on happier lines.

Bates tells how he watched pieces of porous pumice-stone floating on the Amazon which had drifted down from the distant volcanoes of the Andes, and were being carried to the Atlantic. He believed that these fragments of lava, borne by ocean currents, transported in the particles of earth lodged in their cavities seeds and plants destined to bloom on distant shores. Thus the destructive becomes the constructive; the ashes of the volcano are converted into messengers of life and beauty. Yet, far more wonderful, God has compelled war into the service of civilization, and out of its red ruin brought consequences which constitute the best wealth of nations.

Bad movements often eventuate in good. The French Revolution, for example, was a bloody orgie; yet thinking men are agreed that, in important particulars, it has contributed to the larger liberty and enrichment of mankind. A while ago a terrible cloud of locusts settled on certain districts of South Africa, threatening their utter devastation, when in the very nick of time disease broke out amongst the destroyers, a strange parasite attacked them, and they perished by millions, fertilizing the soil they threatened to devastate. This was the splinter of a great law that is operative everywhere, operative always. St. Paul writes of the moral law as "working death by that which is good"; on the contrary, divine Providence is ever working life and blessing by that which is evil.

Let us adoringly own the wisdom, love, and power which untiringly grapple with evil—defeating its diplomacy, penetrating its frauds, outgeneralling it, causing the plague to bring healing in its wings, transforming the instruments of violence and wrong into vessels fit for the altar. Certain men smile when they read of swords being beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks; they dismiss such prophecy as the merest poetry. But these transformations are already in course of accomplishment. Students assure us that the harp, by a long series of modifications, has been developed out of the bow of the primitive savage; one string was added to another, until an article originally devised for murderous purpose has been finally changed into an instrument discoursing sweet music, the symbol of strife and suffering has become the symbol of gaiety and delight. It is a parable of the purifying and transforming energy now at work on the whole infernal paraphernalia, bringing it into the service of godliness and humanity. Evil things are being purged of the vicious elements which deform, dishonour, and destroy; they are being restored to beauty, to beneficence, and noblest uses.

Let us not be overpowered by the vision of the power of evil. Whatever is done against us in our personal life by the injustice of men or the maliciousness of demons shall, whilst we remain faithful, work for our final gain. What is the



moral of the Book of Job but the subordination of alien wrath to the profit of the saint? From a great fight of unmerited affliction we see the patriarch emerge more rich and powerful than when the storm burst upon him, and with a deepened experience that must have given to his restored prosperity tenfold interest and satisfaction. The government of God extorted from the malice of hell splendid spoils in which Job was arrayed. So now with every loyal child of God. "*All things work together for good to them that love God.*" Even the most cruel and wicked things shall serve the followers of that which is good. Taking a wider view, we see that this coercive action of the divine sovereignty extends to the whole drama of cosmic history. This is the argument of St. Paul in his great Epistle to the Romans. "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly: that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward." We are satisfied that Perowne's interpretation of our text is correct: "With the remainder of wrath Thou girdest Thyself"; that is, God puts it on, so to speak, as an ornament—clothes Himself therewith to His own glory. In the end of the ages the Eternal One will be only magnified by the mighty revolt, His universe rendered more

magnificent, His government confirmed forever, and all His saints glorified with Him in the life everlasting.

Though the stream that bubbleth from ye  
 May be black as hell itself,  
 It shall issue in His glory,  
 It shall mirror forth Himself.

Again we say, Let us not be affrighted by the pride and boast of unrighteousness. In our opening remarks we admitted how much plausibility attached to the Satanic revolt, and promised it success; but whilst the arch traitor fixed his eye on the legions of his train, the power of his enchanted weapons, the subtleties of his strategy, how much did he overlook that ought to have given him pause! The impenetrability of truth, the energy of righteousness, the sovereign charm of love, the invincibility of innocence and purity—these are the qualities with which evil has to reckon. The Apostle Paul rebukes the Corinthians, “Ye look at the things that are before your face.” Or, as A. S. Way translates it, “Have you eyes for the outward semblance only?” And this is repeatedly our fault in estimating the place and power of evil. We have eyes for the external aspect of it, we consider only the surface of things. Our view must be more profound. The power of ungodliness and iniquity is represented in revelation by the wild, raging sea which threatens to engulf the nations, whilst yet it is held in check

by dust, the plaything of a child. On the other hand, the power of God is represented by "the waters of Shiloah which go softly." But few things are more wonderful than the energy of waters which go softly. Away in the great cañon of Arizona may be seen how a quiet stream of water has eaten through miles of solid rock, and cut sheer down through thousands of yards of massive limestone to make itself a channel. No explosive gunpowder, no blasting dynamite, only the conquest of softness and silence. The river that maketh glad the city of our God, that murmurs quiet music as it gently flows, shall eat its way through rocks and mountains, and make the barren wastes to sing. Let us have great faith in the mysterious forces which though simple are subtle, silent yet strong, slow but sure. "*There He brake the arrows of the bow; the shield, and the sword, and the battle.*" He whose dwelling-place is Zion, vanquishes the powers of darkness; He whose tabernacle is in Salem, by the breath of His mouth routs the alien army clothed in lightning and thunder. "At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep. Thou, even Thou, art to be feared." To doubt is disloyalty, to falter is sin; for the kingdom that cometh without observation is the kingdom of God and of His Christ, and He shall reign, He shall reign the wide world over, He shall reign forever. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for

the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds); casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

## V

### THE RESPECTIVE CLAIMS OF FACT AND THEORY

*Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?—JOHN iii. 4.*

*The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?—JOHN vi. 52.*

*But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?—I COR. xv. 35.*

**W**E sometimes find ourselves in this position. Certain great articles of our creed appeal to us almost irresistibly, yet we are not able to satisfy our logical sense concerning them; and because we cannot explain either to ourselves or to others the philosophy of the alleged facts, we hesitate to accept them as such. "*How* can a man be born when he is old?" "*How* can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" "*How* are the dead raised?" We do not comprehend the origin, method, or working of the thing, therefore are tempted to disallow it. In our anxiety for a theory we do injustice to the fact. What course ought we, then, to follow when the claims of fact and theory thus seem to come into conflict?

On the one hand, we are urged to suppress inquisitiveness. We must abstain from inquiry into

sources, methods, operations. We are reminded that intellectual refinements have often proved mischievous; and the wiser course is to exclude philosophy and metaphysics, and content ourselves with a religion that is wholly and purely experimental and practical. Whatever truth this counsel may contain, it must not be pushed too far. In regard to natural things modern science has shown how fruitful the spirit of inquiry may prove. Here practical men attempt to limit investigation; they are persuaded that it is impossible to understand this or that, and they are equally confident that if we could acquire such knowledge it would be useless. But time has often proved the mistake of the practical. Gropping in the darkness, the theorist lights upon great truths and laws, and the whole world is enriched. So in regard to religion: we must be at liberty to inquire, analyze, speculate, to ask the why and wherefore, the whence and whither. The restless and insatiable desire to examine, and to examine all subjects without exception, high and low, near and far, human and divine, is the secret of civilization and the spring of progress. We must take care how we attempt to suppress "the obstinate questionings" of our deepest nature; without them there is no life in belief, no expansions of the horizon.

Yet, on the other hand, we must not permit inquisitiveness to prevent our acceptance of facts. If anything presents itself to us with the clearness,



power, and persistence of a fact, we must not attempt to deny it because we cannot divine its secret. The natural philosopher is frequently unable to satisfy himself concerning various elements with which he has to deal, or concerning the laws which govern these elements ; but, having assured himself of the fact, he accepts it as such, gives it full weight in all his calculations, and waits for larger knowledge. Thus ought we to act in religious life and belief ; not denying conspicuous facts because we cannot grasp their philosophy. However profound the mystery that the fact may involve, we must accept the fact, allow its full significance, and wait for further light.

Let us, then, seek to bring these general remarks to bear upon particular instances of religious difficulty.

I. THE MYSTERY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Our Lord taught Nicodemus that to enter into the kingdom of God—that is, to see God, to discern His will, to become capable of doing it, and so to be fit to see His face—demanded a profound change in our nature, a change so deep and radical that it is properly a rebirth, a new creation. This perplexed and offended the rabbi. He could understand how a man might be educated into a theologian, or disciplined into an ecclesiastic ; but how our deepest nature should suffer a radical change under the action of God's Spirit was a mystery with which

he could not grapple, and which therefore he was not prepared to accept. "How can these things be?" Many to-day are perplexed, as Nicodemus was. They understand religion on its educational and tangible side; but the doctrine of regeneration, of conversion, perplexes and offends them. They will consent to the faith of Christ, to the Church of Christ, excepting this one doctrine, which is of its very essence.

Yet what of the fact? Only as our interior eyes are enlightened can we see the kingdom of God; only as our mind, affections, conscience, and will are raised and energized by the Holy Spirit can we enter into that kingdom and share its righteousness and blessedness. Such is the teaching of the Master, and tens of thousands in all generations testify to the truth of His teaching. They are conscious that they have experienced this very change; they know it is a fact, the most glorious fact of their history. They have been transformed in the spirit of their mind; they henceforth walk in newness of life. These witnesses will vary much as to what brought it all about, as to their recognition of the time and place of awakening, and many features of the experiences through which they passed; but concerning the substantial fact itself, that the Spirit of God has imparted to them a higher life, given them a clean heart, and renewed within them a right spirit, they bear testimony to it as the most indubitable and blessed fact of their life. Let there be no mistake

about it; that penitent men are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, is one of the best authenticated facts in the history of the race.

But, it is objected, the doctrine of conversion is unparalleled, there is nothing corresponding with it in the natural world! Is this so? Our Lord reminded Nicodemus that in natural phenomena he would find a parallel to the spiritual doctrine in question. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knoweth not whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is impalpable, its movements unaccountable, but its existence and action are unquestionable; so the Spirit acts in an invisible realm and by laws little understood, yet the blessed consequences of His presence and influence have been demonstrated in the experience and character of millions. And we may easily continue this line of analogy, which is more than analogy. Let us cease to argue as though the doctrine of regeneration were an arbitrary dogma of the Church, having no duplicates elsewhere. Nature teems with the doctrine of conversion. That the base may become pure, the mean be exalted, ugliness change to beauty, the worthless become precious, the pestilent useful, the disgusting delightful, is the work of nature before our eyes every hour—nay, it would be more proper to say, is nature. "Can we make the trampled snow white again?" asks the poet. No,

*we* cannot; but the great Chemist can. He separates it from the mire, draws it up to heaven, refines it in the alembic of the sky, returning it to the earth as white and dazzling as it was before. Can we purge a black blot? Perhaps not; yet if God's sun shines upon our ink-pot, it adds the very ink to the rainbow. Nature is a great system of distillations, exaltations, transmutations, transformations, transfigurations. When grace cleanses the defiled, spiritualizes the sensual, makes that which hath lien among the pots as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold, it does what nature is always doing in the lower sphere, and what science glories in imitating.

Recall what is being done by Luther Burbank in new creations in plant life, and we shall see that the conversion of human nature as a fact and process is wonderfully in harmony with the recoveries and ennoblements of the natural sphere. His biographer proceeds thus: "Running through all his work is the constant effort to break up old habits of life. For one reason or another the plant has been slowly going down the scale, possibly for centuries. To-morrow it must be changed. Just as into the life of a man long inured to bad habits, the son of evil parents, tracing his lineage backward through a century of sin—just as there must come into this life some tremendous shock, be it a death, a terror, a great love, or an overpowering hate, completely chan-

ging the course of his life and making an abrupt break in the generations of crime ; so in a gentler but none the less powerful manner the plant must have the overpowering shock of re-creation, it must irrevocably break with the past. As in the case of the man, so with the flower. The very least of Mr. Burbank's labour is the actual breaking up of the plant's life by the shock of re-creation, the vastest in its scope that a life can bear, such shock as even death does not bring, for it is death and life in one—the death of the old and the birth of the new. When the past of the plant has been broken up, then comes the turning of its life-forces into its new channels.”<sup>1</sup> Here is conversion in the terms of science ; here is science in the terms of theology. Now let me ask, If the student of natural law can work this delightful change, what may not the divine Gardener of the Christian Church do when He puts forth the fullness of His grace and power on the penitent soul ? Cannot He break up the old life by “the shock of re-creation” ? Cannot He effect “an irrevocable break” with our past history ? Cannot He abolish “the tyranny of bad habits” ? Cannot He “turn our life-forces into new channels” ? If the husbandman is able to transform a noxious plant into a veritable palm of paradise, lovely in form, rich in fruition, delicious in perfume, cannot He who knows all the secrets of love and power change the upas-tree of our fallen nature into a tree of

<sup>1</sup> Harwood, *New Creations in Plant Life*.

righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified? Conversion is not something unnatural, irrational, incredible. Surely that alone is not unchangeable that it were most desirable to change.

“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Let not the mystery bewilder you. As Martin Luther exhorts, “Crucify the ‘How?’” Repent of past years, turn your back on the old life, put the promising, pardoning God to the proof; and you shall know by blessed experience that it is possible to pass from death unto life.

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE MAINTENANCE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. “The Jews therefore strove one with another, saying, How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” As there is mystery in the origination of the spiritual life, so is there mystery in its maintenance. This sixth chapter of St. John is designed to teach that, as our spiritual being is re-created in Christ Jesus, so the life of the soul is maintained through fellowship with Him. As bread and water satisfy bodily need, so He satisfies the spiritual craving of our nature, and satisfies it so absolutely that there is no need of seeking any other. “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.” “I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea, and the bread which I will



give is My flesh, for the life of the world." "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth Me, he also shall live because of Me." Intimate oneness with Christ is the secret of spiritual, moral, and eternal life.

At this teaching the Jews revolted. "Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" "Upon this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Do not many to-day similarly object to the doctrine of personal union with Christ? That association with the Church may constitute a man a Christian; that an intellectual acquiescence in the Christian creed entitles us to rank with believers; that participation in Christian sacraments and ordinances possesses a certain religious virtue,—all this they can accept, all this is intelligible: but that we live a spiritual life, maintained by constant fellowship with the risen Lord, is an assumption nothing less than a piece of mysticism which they decline.

But what of the fact? Within the Church of God is a vast multitude of the noblest and purest men and women living on the earth. They are just, blameless, patient, self-sacrificing, ideal in character and conduct. They far transcend the dead, sunken level of ordinary human nature. Cynical critics are fond of enlarging upon the frailties and follies of their fellows; but really this scorn is gratuitous and useless: there is nothing to wonder at here; it is exactly what we might

expect. The thing to beget wonder is the host of the saints who live at such an elevation beyond the level of our normal nature. When we remember the strength of our lower passions, the weakness of our higher instincts, the coarsening influences of the world, the power of temptation, the pressure of trial, the mystery of society is the presence in it of the spiritual, the spotless, the self-forgetting, yes, the uncommon good. These are in our midst, they are more numerous than many of us can discern, and they constitute the very miracle of society. Now inquire of these their secret. How is it that they remain loyal to the highest amid so much that is low ; humble, kind and faithful ; unspotted from the world and the flesh ? They answer, with unanimous testimony, that Christ lives in them, walks in them, and they can do all through Him who strengthens them. Their identification with Him is the secret of their peace, vitality, righteousness, charity, and hope. This is the victory by which they overcome themselves and the world, even their trust in Him, and daily affiance and fellowship with Him. It is "Christ in them" the source of purity, the secret of strength, the hope of glory. What can we say to this ? It is a fact not to be denied or explained away.

But it is objected, There is nothing like this doctrine of union with Christ in the spheres of life with which we are otherwise familiar ; we can understand the processes of natural life and nourishment, but not this. Is this so ? Christ compares

Himself with the vine, and represents His disciples as the branches : do we, then, understand the subtle processes by which the vine draws virtue from the soil, and by which the sap is converted into fibre, leaf, and cluster ? A naturalist remarks : "The biography of a tropical tree has never been written. When it is, few books will equal it in interest." The biography of no tree has ever been written ; and, so far as concerns its inwardness, never will. We see only the exterior, the mechanism, whilst the life, the growth, the fruition, are impenetrable secrets. Our Lord compares Himself with the bread by which we live : do we, then, understand how the food we consume becomes the basis of our corporeal life ? The mystery of matter, the mystery of life, the mystery of growth, are the persistent problems of philosophy ; and it is folly to pretend that we comprehend all that is involved in the nourishment of a plant or in the succouring of the body. Do we, then, consent to starve because life and its maintenance imply impenetrable secrets ? We postpone the philosophy, and concern ourselves with the fact.

It is even more true that we cannot follow the processes by which our intellectual life is nourished. Who can explain the subtle workings by which the scientific mind feeds on truth or the poetic imagination feeds on beauty ? That the intellect exists, that it is sustained, invigorated, and developed, are delightful facts none will presume to gainsay ; but how this is all brought to pass is a

world of absolute mystery. Why, then, if our physical and psychic life is thus hidden, should we expect to apprehend all the mystery of our spiritual life, assimilation, and development?

Let us not murmur with these Jews, blinded as they were by carnality. Put the doctrine of this sixth chapter of St. John to the proof. Once more I say with Luther, "Crucify the 'How?'" "Taste and see that the Lord is gracious." Seek to see Him, to trust Him, to brood over Him, to drink in His Spirit, to live and dwell with Him. "Feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving." Then shall you know the truth of the Master's great words, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE CONSUMMATION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. "But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?" This question concerning the resurrection-body may represent the whole mystery of the future.

The resurrection of the dead is a doctrine everywhere taught directly or by revelation. In the Old Testament it appears in gleams more or less bright. It is impossible to understand much of the Old Testament unless we are willing to allow that the Hebrews substantially held the belief of a resurrection of the dead. In the New Testament

the doctrine becomes cardinal. It is of the essence of the teaching of our Lord and of His apostles. "Now is Christ risen from the dead ; and become the first-fruits of them that slept." Rationalistic critics, whose rôle it is to reduce the supernatural element in revelation to a minimum, refine away the narrative of our Lord's resurrection and ascension until it becomes little more than a religious version of Jack and the Beanstalk ; but if we are to accept anything in the New Testament as literally and absolutely true, it is the record of our Lord's resurrection. His body was raised from the dead ; His tomb was vacant ; His corporeal nature appeared identically the same, yet in certain qualities profoundly changed ; a multitude of witnesses testify to His real, spiritualized, and glorified Presence. And the resurrection of the Christ is the pattern and pledge of the resurrection of all who believe in Him. The New Testament glows with the doctrines of resurrection, glorification, immortality.

But exactly here many object to the Christian faith. "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked." And as these Athenians did, so do many to this hour. "How are the dead raised ? and with what manner of body do they come ?" Because they cannot understand the processes implied in the resurrection, and find a satisfactory theory of another world and a future life, they hesitate to accept the glorious creed which declares, "I believe in the

resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." These doubters and deniers affirm that in the whole range of nature there is nothing analogous to the resurrection; they maintain that we have no knowledge or experience of any answering uplifting and glorification. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." To this they respond, "We have no experience of any such ennoblement, and cannot believe it."

Yet is this so? Are there not facts before our eyes brought to light by modern science which prove the marvellous plasticity and immense possibilities of animal organization? The late Prof. H. G. Seely writes thus: "The two types of true wings are limited to birds and bats; and no living reptile approximates to developing such an organ of flight as a wing. Judged, therefore, by the method of comparing the anatomical structures of one animal with another, which is termed 'comparative anatomy,' the existence of flying reptiles might be pronounced impossible. But in the light which the revelations of geology afford, our convictions become tempered with modesty; and we learn that *with Nature nothing is impossible, in development of animal structure.*"<sup>1</sup> And he proceeds to explain how the crocodile and bird have descended from a common ancestor.

<sup>1</sup> *Dragons of the Air*, p. 36.



That the bird is a near relative of the lizard is a commonplace of science ; and unless nearly all our great authorities are at fault, the bird is descended, though not from any existing reptile, yet from ancestors that were definitely reptilian. The scale of the reptile corresponds to the feather of the bird ; indeed, the most elaborate feather is only a much-divided scale. The plume of the ostrich, the wing of the albatross, the tail-feather of the lyre-bird, the train of the peacock, the gorgeous plumage of the bird of paradise, are only the much differentiated, highly wrought, and transfigured scales of the lizard of the primitive slime.<sup>1</sup>

Now, if God can effect these physical exaltations ; if, by one magical touch added to another He can glorify the animal, as a great painter by a thousand caresses creates out of coarse paint a prismatic masterpiece ; what may He not do when He puts forth the fullness of His power on the bodies of His saints ? If Almightyness can educe from snake, lizard, or crocodile the sweet minstrel that sings at heaven's gate, the golden eagle that soars in the sun, the bird of paradise that lights with splendour the forest, why should not the redeeming God "fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself" ? When I hear the scientist declaring that

<sup>1</sup>Headley, *Structure and Life of Birds*.

“nothing is impossible in development of animal structure,” and that the superb singers of the sky have been evolved from some ancient reptile, I fancy myself listening to a naturalistic priest reading the funeral service: “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” Only this time it is not the funeral service, but the ode of the resurrection; for the resurrection is past already, and in the bird of paradise the body of glory is already before the celebrant’s eyes. We do not set this argument forth as a demonstration of the resurrection of the body; it does, however, entitle us to ask, “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” If He can effect these marvellous transformations in the brute world, surely He may conserve and perfect in a manner yet more wonderful the bodily and spiritual life of His elect and redeemed.

Let us not, then, decline the future because we cannot frame any satisfactory theory of it. Once more, “Crucify the ‘How?’” We know not what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him. Whilst we peep, and guess, and sigh, let our supreme anxiety be that we are fit to see His face.

## VI

### THE SIGH OF THE SINCERE

*Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts : and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.—Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.*

IN this wonderful psalm the divine attributes of omnipresence and omniscience are most eloquently set forth. It is a large subject ; but the writer does not lose himself in immensity—he recognizes its immediate personal bearing. “O Lord, Thou hast searched *me*, and known *me*. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.” And the moral bearing of the solemn theme is felt by the psalmist to be of the first consequence. He does not contemplate the divine immanence and transcendence like a poet, nor treat it as a philosopher, metaphysician, or theologian. He is fully alive to the fact that the all-pervading Spirit is the Spirit of righteousness, and he dares to solicit that the all-illuminating, all-cleansing eye of God shall search his breast. “Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts.” No mere poetry or speculation is here ; all is made of im-

mediate, personal, moral concern. That every lurking weakness or evil of his nature may be revealed and destroyed, the speaker is prepared to submit himself to the fierce light streaming from the great white throne. In his absolute sincerity he is willing to lay bare the very grounds of his nature and inmost life to the divine criticism.

#### I. THE EXAMINATION INVOKED.

1. Mark the *range* of this examination. "*Search me, O God, and know my heart.*" Bishop Horsley's translation reads: "O Jehovah, Thou hast *explored* me, and Thou knowest me." God knows him because He has explored him. The psalmist stands perplexed before the mystery of his own being; he is at once ignorant of himself and yet mistrustful of himself; he does not know himself, yet knows himself sufficiently well to suspect himself; therefore he appeals to the Spirit who searcheth all things. How true it is that we are mainly unknown to ourselves; that within us are unexplored regions; that our heart is substantially undiscovered! Schopenhauer one day strayed into the Royal Gardens of Berlin; and when an officer inquired of him, "Who are you, sir?" the philosopher responded, "I don't know; I shall be glad if you can tell me." The officer reported him for a lunatic; but he was far from that—he was one who had deeply pondered the mystery of personality, and was accordingly puzzled by it.

Yes, what strangers we are to ourselves! Within us are untraversed continents; mountain-peaks of

aspiration, capped with cloud ; volcanoes whose existence is betrayed every now and again as they drop blazing lava on our path ; cataracts of power and passion ; jungles in whose depths lurk wild beasts ; fiery deserts of strange thirsts and seductive mirages ; icy poles of drear discontents and despairs ; ungotten wealth of faculty and sensibility ; treasures of darkness ; and vast skies sown with mysterious stars and ominous meteors. Our personality is largely unmapped ; the heights and depths of the soul, its capacities and forces, its possibilities for good and evil, are only dimly perceived and faintly understood. We know more of the world outside than we do of the universe within us. The psychological Columbus has not yet arrived ; no Cortez has yet scaled the peaks of the soul.

But what is beyond our ken is set in the light of God's countenance. All the sacred writers speak with awe of His knowledge of our subtle nature, of His unique knowledge. We are told that radiography—that is, the photography of the interior of the human body by means of the X-rays—has recently been greatly improved. So rapidly can the human body be radiographed that snapshots can be taken with the rays, and Dr. Rosenthal, of Munich, has photographed the heart of a living person in one-tenth of a second. Now, this lightning picture of a human heart fairly represents those flashes of insight we occasionally get into our essential self, of which the physical organ

is a metaphor. At the back of our reasonings, feelings, and volitions is a world unknown except as it is revealed by glimpses and expressed in guesses. But He who made us in the lowest parts of the earth comprehends us and knows us altogether. "For Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men." As the whole physical universe is known to the Almighty Spirit, as He calls every star by name, and inhabits every province ; so the rational universe is displayed to the divine gaze, and there is no mystery of body, brain, or spirit to Him. "There is no creature that is not manifest in His sight : but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Here, then, the psalmist pleads that the Spirit immanent in the natural world in all its vastness and manifoldness will similarly pervade the interior world. "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there : if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." So, pleads the psalmist, As Thou art everywhere in the material universe, diffusing light, maintaining harmony, conserving health, creating life, scattering beauty ; as there is no corner of space without Thy knowledge, presence, and quickening : so explore my whole nature, destroy all the



hidden evil, correct every false bias, foster and perfect any possibility of righteousness. The word "thought" in the twenty-third verse signifies branches, branchings of the act of thinking.<sup>1</sup> So the psalmist pleads with the Holy Spirit to search and hallow all the ramifications of his thought, the whole sphere of his perceiving, reflecting, feeling, and determination; all that pertains to the sources, processes, expressions, and far-reaching consequences of thought. "Thus saith the Lord, I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." Therefore must we put our trust, not in our partial and superficial inspections, but in His searchings and findings who knows the whole mystery and history of the soul.

2. The *depth* of this examination. "And know my *thoughts*." "My inward thoughts, my distant thoughts, the thoughts not yet come into my mind." Ewald translates this, "Prove me, and know my *dreams*." Not the dreams of the night, which are fantastic and negligible; but the waking dream, the first ghostly inception of the act. As David expressed it in his admonition to Solomon: "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the *imagination* of the *thoughts*." And this expression is used in several other places. Before the contemplation of the deed, or the articulation

<sup>1</sup> Delitzsch.

of the word, come imagination, inclination, curiosity, reverie. The sympathy, brooding, longing, that precede the idea; the thought that comes before the word, the wish that is father of the thought. All acts are first dreams, too faint for definition, too elusive for anything like satisfactory explanation; and evil acts are first evil dreams so shadowy as apparently to be without serious signification. Every robbery is first transacted in the phantom gold of imagination; murder is first rehearsed within the closed doors of secret malice; we lie in our heart before we lie with our tongue; the unclean act is born in a sullied fancy; deeds of pride, covetousness, and ambition are first dalliances with mental imagery and emotional moods apparently far from reality. Our dreams indicate what we potentially are, they forecast what we may actually become, and they have a strange trick of fulfilling themselves. Yes, this is the main matter—what we mean in our heart of hearts, what lies at the bottom of our heart. “All mind finally becomes visible.”

Standing on a low moral level, we cannot discern the truth concerning our deepest self; that is possible only to “the Holiest in the height.” It is a fact well known to seamen that objects under water, such as shoals and sunken rocks, become visible, or more visible, when viewed from a height; and it is customary at sea, when a sunken object is suspected of lying in a vessel’s course, but cannot be seen from the deck, to send a man

aloft, when the higher he can climb the mast the farther will his vision penetrate beneath the waves. From the top of a lofty cliff the depth is seen better still; whilst the elevation of a balloon enables the spectator to see most perfectly beneath the surface, and to detect the sunken mines, torpedoes, and the like which may be concealed there. Now, just as there is an optical reason why the depth is best penetrated from the height, so there is a moral reason why the holy God best knows the plagues and perils of the human heart. He who from the pure heaven of eternal light and purity looks down into the depths of the heart is cognizant of its defects long before they report themselves in the creature-consciousness. Repeatedly in revelation is the moral loftiness of God associated with His detection and abhorrence of human sin. "The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." "The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men." Just as in the natural world the depth is discerned from the height; so in the spiritual sphere He who is high and lifted up in the glory of holiness is conscious most, and conscious first, of the wrong that is in His universe, however it may be disguised or concealed. "He revealeth the deep and secret things: He knoweth what is in the darkness; and the light dwelleth with Him." The same fact is illustrated in the history of our Lord. "But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them; for He knew all men." By virtue of His

supreme purity He became conscious of the impurity and treasonableness of the most specious, and did not commit Himself unto them.

It is one thing to examine ourselves ; it is another to surrender ourselves unreservedly to the divine criticism. St. Paul writes : " Try your own selves, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves " (2 Cor. xiii. 5). Yet, whilst he wrote this, he was entirely conscious that we may make serious mistakes concerning ourselves ; for in addressing this selfsame church on a former occasion, he confessed : " Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself ; yet am I not hereby justified : but He that judgeth me is the Lord " (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4). He was not conscious of any dereliction of duty ; yet he might be deceived, and therefore submitted himself to the Lord for judgment. Not for one moment can we understand and estimate ourselves as does He who searcheth the heart. When, in 1896, the engineers were planning the foundations for the Williamsburg Bridge, New York, the deepest of their twenty-two borings was a hundred and twelve feet below high water. Steel drills had indicated bed-rock from twelve to twenty feet higher than was the actual case ; the diamond drill, however, showed the supposed bed-rock to be merely a deposit of boulders. So the diamond drill of God pierces our self-delusions, detects the fallacy of our assumptions, proves what we thought sterling to be only stones of emptiness, discloses the very truth

of things far down the secret places of the soul.

Here again, then, the psalmist seeks to shelter himself in omnipresence, to engage omniscience to work on his behalf. He resolves to think, live, and act beneath the divine search-light. He prays: "Warn me against the submarines which steal upon me with smooth, insidious death; protect me from the devil-fish which wait their hour in dark, unfathomed caves; be to me a beacon against sunken rock and treacherous shoal; pilot me clear of the cruel torpedoes which line the channels of life." It is the prayer of the patriarch: "That which I see not, teach Thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." It is the prayer of the psalmist: "Who can discern his errors? Clear Thou me from hidden faults."

3. The *severity* of this examination. "*Try me.*" "Prove me." He is willing to be subjected to severe discipline that the falseness and foulness of nature shall be sevenfold purified. In the Revised Version the third verse stands, "Thou searchest out my path and my lying down." But the margin reads, "Thou *winnowest* my path"—a close and cleansing scrutiny. As the thresher separates the golden corn from the valueless chaff, so the psalmist prays that the divine Analyst will deliver him from whatever is gross and worthless. Said John the Baptist, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I: whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor; and

He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire." This is He whose verdict we challenge. Or, to change the image, the psalmist is ready to suffer the severe ordeal of the refiner. "Try me," as reputed gold is tested. Solomon writes, "The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold : but the Lord trieth the hearts." The psalmist welcomes the biting of the flame so that pretense should be expelled from his truth, temper refined out of his zeal, pride purged from his humility, self-will discharged from his conscientiousness, and the scum of hypocrisy no longer dim the gold of his goodness. The consummate ability of Stas, the Belgian chemist, is celebrated because he "eliminated from his chemicals every trace of that pervasive element, sodium, so thoroughly that even its spectroscopic detection was impossible." But such is the efficacy of divine grace that it can eliminate so thoroughly every trace of that pervasive and persistent element known as sin that we may be presented before the throne holy and unreprouable and without blemish. That the sincere may attain this purification, they are prepared to pass through the hot fires of bitter and manifold discipline.

II. THE DESIGN OF THIS EXAMINATION.  
The ulterior purpose, as expressed by the text, is twofold.

I. *Deliverance from our own way of life.*  
"See if there be any way of wickedness in me." The psalmist recognizes that human life is de-



terminated from within. The "way" is first "in" us. How often do we see this! A youth is set in the right path, every assistance is secured for him, every encouragement is given him to pursue it; but he soon breaks away from this, forms other habits, adopts other companions, pursues an altogether different life. He does not follow the path that was opened up to him from the outside, but elects one already traced in his heart. We popularly say of such a willful soul, "He took his own way, followed his own course." A modern cry calls upon us to "fulfill ourselves." That really means work out your own fancies, tastes, and passions; propose your own ideals, be ruled by self-will, take counsel of the pride and passion of your own heart, chase your own phantoms. But, as has been said, if everybody should "fulfill" himself, it would mean pandemonium; it would be the working out of ignorance, egotism, and lust. This is precisely what the psalmist deprecates. He urgently pleads for deliverance from himself; from the poisonous particle, the diseased fibre, the false substance and quality which may exist within him, latent and lethargic, waiting for the stimulation of circumstance, opportunity, and association.

Our own way is a way of *emptiness*. Some would translate these words, "any way of idols in me." It signifies the vanity, the unreality, the delusiveness of the objects on which the natural man fixes his ambition and hope. We sometimes

say of a thing, "There is nothing in it." We may say this of wealth, honour, pleasure, fame; if we make idols of them, we know that an idol is nothing in the world. If I follow the desires and devices of my own heart, I walk in a vain show and disquiet myself in vain. Our own way is a way of *pain*. "See if there is any way of grievousness in me." The path of self-fulfillment is hard and bitter. If the roses in the broad road of sensual pleasure, sordid gain, and worldly pride are red, there is no wonder; enough blood has been shed to make them so. In the forests of South America, where gorgeous orchids dazzle the eyes and gay blossoms carpet the earth, are also creepers furnished with formidable thorns known as "the devil's fishing-hooks"; and as these trail insidiously on the ground their presence is revealed only by the wounded foot that treads upon them. How closely this pictures the wayward, sensual, worldly life, whose flowers of colour secrete stinging thorns which lacerate the heart! Our own way is a way of *destruction*. Not leading to a goal of lasting felicity, but descending into darkness and despair. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." That is the path and doom of self-fulfillment. And we do not know why Solomon, in another place, exactly repeats this warning; except, perhaps, because of its immense significance, and yet of its likelihood to be overlooked. So, then, we must pray that

God will not abandon us to ourselves ; that we may not be permitted to work out the lurking naughtiness of our heart.

The other petition seeks —

2. *Guidance in God's way.* “And lead me in the way everlasting.” The way of final peace, security, and progress ; of imperishable strength, full felicity, and of eternal life. The New Testament is the exposition of this royal road. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life : no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” To fulfill ourselves is to destroy ourselves ; the secret of life is to fulfill Him. The crucial alternative is, Will we fulfill the Lord Jesus or ourselves ? live to self or die to self ? live unto God or to the world ? live to the poor, narrow, vanishing present, or lay up treasure for the future ? As He dwells in us we break the dominion of past years of selfishness and worldliness : as we fulfill Him—that is, as our life in His grace becomes one of faith, obedience, righteousness, and self-sacrifice—we find rest unto the soul. In Him we enter on the way everlasting ; in Him prove the strength to walk therein ; in Him find the unfailing guide ; in Him reach the golden goal.

Is this, then, *our* prayer ? the sigh of *our* heart ? Amid theological uncertainties, controversies, and distractions, do we take refuge in this simple cry ?—“Lord, teach me, lead me, uphold me, save me.” “Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and

my groaning is not hid from Thee." Are we prepared for every renunciation and ordeal that this pleading may imply? If so, we shall be heard. None can wander or perish with this prayer in his heart.

## VII

### THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT

*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night.—Exod. xiii. 21.*

HERE we see in a figure the fact that God goes before the race; anticipating, providing, adjusting, so that in due season He may bring us into the Canaan of His accomplished purpose. The most cursory view of the world and history impresses one with the feeling that all things have been thought out beforehand; and closer examination, revealing how the sense of the future dominates the present, confirms us in the belief of a supernatural, prescient government that controls individual life and universal movement to some ulterior perfection. This special aspect we desire now to consider.

I. THE DIVINE PREPARATION OF THE EARTH AS THE SCENE FOR HUMAN LIFE AND DISCIPLINE furnishes an instructive illustration of our text. Ages before man's advent on this planet we behold the divine hand fashioning it for his habitation. The darkness that "rested upon the face of the waters" was the hiding of the creative Spirit whilst He resolved the rude elements into

order and beauty. Think of the cloud of the carboniferous era eclipsing the sun and wrapping everything in awful shadow! Yet the fire and darkness of geologic ages were pillars of the Lord heralding a new earth. When the race arose out of the vasty deep, the world was found exquisitely fitted for it, and richly stored with all necessary treasure. Preparing the home for the return of the bridal party is always an interesting affair. How wondrous, then, the garnishing of the earth as the home of humanity! What vast ages were demanded! What an immensity of material! What complex adjustments needed perfecting! What involutions for the angels to wonder at, as we now marvel at the evolutions! The divine Architect and Builder dwelt in the twin pillars of flame and gloom, ordering all that is; and when the fullness of time brought the sons of God, the darkness had been banished, the dragons destroyed, the crypts were replete with wealth, and the glowing flowers and singing birds welcomed the heir. Whatever was necessary for our physical maintenance, intellectual discipline, or social joy, was present in lavish abundance.

What room is here for admiration and reverence! Alas! some see nothing to wonder at in the harmony existing between the world and its tenants; but the reverential mind finds endless cause for wonder and admiration. In the early spring we have noticed the first wild flower of the season open by the wayside; and whilst yet ad-



miring it, the first butterfly of the year settled upon it: they arrived in the same hour to complete each other. It is a parable of the surprising manner in which man and his world complete each other, and in which they develop together. God "went before us" in wisdom and love, to establish ten thousand delicate articulations and adjustments between us and our sphere for our perfect efficiency and happiness.

What a firm ground of confidence we find here touching the abiding welfare of the race! Pessimistic spirits are fond of propounding sceptical conundrums respecting the future. What will posterity do when the forests are depleted? what when the coal measures fail? what when population outstrips the means of subsistence? How truly absurd these apprehensions are! As the need arises, our scientists open to us storehouses which have been sealed from the foundation of the world. They are ever discovering new elements, lights, forces, fruits, which our fathers knew not. The "faithful Creator" has in reserve a thousand secret magazines which He will discover as the race reaches its successive stages of development. Nature abounds with signs that God has passed this way before, that He has anticipated us with the blessings of His goodness, and means to see His children through.

II. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE RACE supplies another illustration of the divine prescience. The future constitutes the main thought of revelation;

and it everywhere teaches that the government of the world at any given point is regulated by a concern for the future, for a distant future. We must be struck by the fact that modern philosophy is so largely occupied with futurity. Fifty years ago Positivism, which placed the chief emphasis upon the past, was the popular theory. A favourite, we may say a cardinal, doctrine of this system is that of the dominion of the dead. "The growing dominion of the Dead over the Living, a truth which is at the bottom of all sound explanations in Sociology, as it is at the bottom of all harmony in Practical life. In face of this irresistible pressure of our ancestors, the agitations of our contemporaries grow more and more idle, even in situations where they have the greatest scope." <sup>1</sup> And this writer is never weary of insisting on the sovereignty of the departed generations. The supreme factor in the life of the race is the past. True worship is ancestral. The centre of gravity is the graveyard. How entirely contrary is all this to the predominant philosophy of our day! In the evolutionary conception, the future is the centre of significance. Benjamin Kidd regards all the movements of nature and society as regulated by the principle of "Projected Efficiency." <sup>2</sup> Civilization is not controlled by antiquity; the aim of nature is never contemporary life; but everything in the present is subordinated

<sup>1</sup> Comte's *Works*, vol. ii, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup> *The Principles of Western Civilization*.

to the interests of the future. The thought of the efficiency and welfare of future generations controls the direction and meaning of the whole evolutionary process. The centre of significance has been changed by the predominant science from the past to the future; the welfare of the unborn determines the deepest processes of nature and life. The world is not governed by the coffin, but by the cradle.

As already intimated, the whole of revelation is pervaded by the thought of the future; and so far it is in correspondence with the accredited science of the age. "The Lord went before them in a cloud." His purpose is always beyond the present; and the present is shaped and disciplined with a view to that ultimate design which shall justify the whole process. In the history of Israel, we venture to think, we have an illustration on a small scale of God's larger method of government. "Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt: Thou preparedst room before it." Palestine was prepared for Israel. "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant." Joseph set in motion a train of events which prepared Israel to take possession of Palestine. Is not this process of adjustment and progress ever going on in the wide world and in the sweep of the ages? Surely God is preparing waste lands as theatres of new empire, in due season to be occupied by elect nations. We cannot contemplate vast regions of the earth now opening

up, climes rich with possibilities, without anticipating the period when they will be inherited by mighty populations yet unborn. They are the waiting Canaans of God's predestined ones.

The divine foreknowledge is similarly at work in providing us with seers and leaders. "He sent a man before them, even Joseph." He is always sending a Joseph. Pioneers, outriders, heralds, missionaries, are ever beckoning on the peoples, and showing them the onward path. They come in science, industry, discovery, philosophy, government; they greet suns and summers yet below the horizon; they predict fairer conditions, happier methods, better times, and show the paths by which coveted heights may be reached. As a modern poet sings:

The soldier, the king, and the peasant  
Are working together in one,  
Till our dream shall become their Present,  
And their work in the world be done.  
They had no vision amazing  
Of the goodly house they are raising,  
They had no divine foreshowing  
Of the land to which they are going;  
But on one man's soul it hath broken  
A light that doth not depart,  
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,  
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

So, by the concurrence of the natural and the human, heaven is ever bringing its great purposes to pass. We do not see far, and then see dimly, but it is evident that the governing Spirit

of history works within a much vaster horizon ; and the claims of the future are understood and answered in the present. We are conditioned by time ; but the world is governed in the eternal : one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Often do the spirits  
Of great events stride on before the events,  
And in to-day already walks to-morrow.

Whilst thus reassured concerning the cosmic control, let us bring the great truth home to ourselves and remember how in our personal history God goes before us. It has been argued that we ought by this time to have acquired a much greater power of discerning the future. One writer laments that "it is quite incomprehensible that we should not know the future . . . it is unpardonably stupid . . . and extremely inconvenient." We may readily grant that our ignorance of futurity is "extremely inconvenient." To go no further, every operator on the Stock Exchange is conscious of the misery of this vexatious limitation ; but our incapacity in this direction is extreme, and it is not likely to be removed. Very slowly and dubiously do we learn to interpret the simple phenomena of nature, and to infer the weather of coming days and months ; to anticipate events, however, which depend upon the mysterious action of a myriad human wills is an exercise which promises little

success. To establish prophecy on the basis of science will be the latest achievement of the human mind.

What, then, is our consolation amid the nebulousness and perplexity of human life? That our times are in His hands who knows the future, and whose attribute of prescience ever works on our behalf. Sydney Smith's counsel that we should take "short views" is excellent; but the justification of the short view is that we hold the hand of One who takes the long view.

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene—one step enough for me.

The justification of our contented short-sightedness is that He keeps our feet who never loses sight of the terminus. With absolute confidence may the sincere and faithful dare the unknown; for they know that their life is a plan of God, and that He will never fail to superintend its working. We have not passed this way before, but He has; therefore we find the table spread, the wells dug, the palms flourishing, the rivers bridged, and the great rock casting its grateful shade. When the day is over, our little children fall asleep without giving a thought to the necessities of to-morrow; they rest in a simple confidence that somehow all will continue to fall out happily, and that they will lack no good thing. Long after they are in bed, however, the parent sits up to anticipate, plan, and



provide for coming days and years; and the smoothness and safety of the child's life are ensured in this loving parental foresight. God does the thinking for all His children; and the revealing years prove so rich and gracious because of the all-comprehending eye and love. "The Lord your God . . . went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in"; and the stations for our tents are fixed all the way until travelling days are done.

III. THE DIVINE ANTICIPATION OF OUR SPIRITUAL NEED affords another proof of the prescient element of the world. When the morning stars sang for joy over the new-made and radiant world, they could never have guessed that it was destined to become the stage of tragedy. They would only have prophesied for it golden ages of glory and joy. The event, however, has proved far otherwise. The rosy dawn was followed by a long sad day; let us rather say, by a long dark night. Yet here again God went before the race in the provision of His mercy.

Truly wonderful are the foregleams of redemption darting out of the depths of past eternity! Our Lord recognizes in Himself the "Ancient of Days," and views His work in the light of eternity. "Father, those whom Thou hast given Me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." Where our Lord

certainly means that the eternal Father loved the redeeming Son ; loved Him in the light of His atoning life and death. St. Peter perceives the everlasting purpose. He with whose precious blood we were redeemed “was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world.” The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews signifies that the salvation of mankind was planned and committed to the Son from the beginning : “although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” Very fully does St. Paul bring out this sublime truth in his Epistle to the Ephesians. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” And the Apocalypse celebrates “the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world.” It is recorded of a great modern engineer that he was prepared at a moment’s notice to deal with any emergency that might arise in the carrying out of his gigantic undertakings ; whilst all the rest were panic-stricken, he knew at once how to meet the catastrophe ; it seemed as though he had thought out the whole situation before it arose. To illustrate the great by the small, how clear it is that from the genesis of things Almighty Love foresaw and provided against that element of evil which began so early to work our woe !

In the earliest page of history the idea of redemption began to assert and define itself. The passion-flower grew in paradise. The funda-

mental thought of Israel was the knowledge of the true Deliverer. And as the world awoke to the consciousness of sin, it concurrently awoke to the knowledge of a provided salvation. As the race became alive to its peril, it found the fire-escape built into the very fabric of things. As the storm of wrath broke forth against unrighteousness, the ark of salvation was disclosed in the midst of the deluge. No sooner did the deadly virus work in our veins, than the plant of healing sprang by our side. As the angry angels slammed upon us the gate of Eden, another door opened, a veritable gate Beautiful, into a fairer paradise. The world has never been left without some sense of heavenly sympathy, divine help, and ultimate salvation. God went before the race in a pillar of cloud ; yes, in the darkest yet divinest cloud of redemption : He has led the procession of the ages with the pillar of the cross.

Thus, too, our individual spiritual life is anticipated. We believe in prevenient grace, in the grace that antedates all experience ; and this doctrine needs just now to be specially affirmed. The popular notion at the moment is that the ape and tiger have secured the initiative, and that we thus begin life at a moral disadvantage. Our inferior instincts and passions having secured possession, life is prejudiced from its very beginning. This is not, however, the teaching of revelation. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity ; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Such a representation

would seem to sanction the popular view ; but another passage from the greatest of the psalms places the divine knowledge and action at the very fountain of being. "For Thou hast formed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see mine imperfect substance, and in Thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." Here the psalmist is not writing as a physiologist or a poet, but specially from the religious standpoint, recognizing the action and purpose of the righteous God in the very genesis of our being. The principle of lawlessness works in us from our birth ; yet the fundamental and primordial structure and inclination are divine. The forming Hand gave to the fresh creation a secret bias to truth, beauty, and goodness. Experience confirms this. We no sooner reach consciousness than we awake to the claims of righteousness. We may "go astray from the womb speaking lies" ; we know, however, that they are lies, and that we ought not, and need not, either to speak or do them. Conscience was the first faculty of the marvellous organization ; the thoughts of God were interwoven with all its embroidery ; divine grace attended the first stirrings of the soul.

All the scenes and experiences of life are ante-

dated by grace. Nature is full of prevision. "Spring hides behind autumn's mask"; and as Richard Jefferies puts it, "The butterflies of next summer are somewhere under the snow." The future dominates all nature, and the observer marks prophetic signs in every living thing. We have seen that the same is true in the evolution of society; the general life of to-day being determined by considerations transcending the present. And we feel sure that in the education and discipline of His children the future is a factor never lost sight of by the heavenly Father. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Grace comes before duty. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." We are created for the works, and the works are created for us. With the call of duty comes that secret strengthening which renders us efficient when the moment for execution arrives. Grace comes before temptation. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The Advocate anticipates the crisis, forewarns and forearms His tempted ones.

Shut my heart up like a flower  
At temptation's darksome hour.

We are heard in that we fear, and are strangely fortified against assault. Grace comes before tribulation. Just as the tree, in anticipation of winter's extreme cold, provides protective bracts for

the delicate leaves of the next summer ; or as birds and butterflies are prompted, by mysterious influences, to shelter themselves against the approaching tempest : so souls destined to great trial are secretly informed and strengthened that they may meet the ordeal without amazement. "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me."

IV. THAT CHRIST HAS GONE BEFORE US INTO THE HEAVENLY PLACE shall furnish our final illustration. "A cloud received Him out of their sight." As in a cloud the Creator went before us, fashioning this world for our indwelling, so in the cloud of the Ascension has the Redeemer gone before us to make ready a new sphere of beauty and delight. "I go to prepare a place for you," was His solemn assurance in the parting hour—an assurance that He is fulfilling every day for thousands of His people. "For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like a pattern to the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us." As in the ancient time He prepared Palestine for Israel, so now He prepares the sphere of glory for the saints, and makes the saints meet for their inheritance in light.

And why should we hesitate to believe in this promised world and its immortality? Is not the problem of a future world and of our lot in it substantially solved by the fact that we are here in possession of this? If the creative Spirit could



call us out of absolute nothingness, and make us all that we are here and now, why should we question His power to call us out of this sphere of incompleteness into a higher realm? The first act was surely infinitely the more difficult. Seeing that we awoke within the dust, that we have burst through the clods, that we have struggled half-way up the stalk towards perfection, why should we not shoot the other half and to-morrow break into flower? We shall! I know it, am sure of it! "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." "Forerunner"! Beautiful title, mighty significance! We have no reason to be afraid of the future of this life; nor of the mystery of death; nor of the darkness of worlds unknown. "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rereward." He heads the procession; He closes it; He is round about it on every side.

Where our banner leads us,  
We may safely go;  
Where our Chief precedes us,  
We may face the foe.  
His right arm is o'er us;  
He our Guide will be.  
Christ hath gone before us;  
Christians, follow ye!

## VIII

### THE SIN OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

*Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; let them not have dominion over me : then shall I be perfect, and I shall be clear from great transgression.—Ps. xix. 13.*

THE world in which we find ourselves is necessarily a world of danger—of natural and moral danger. Physically we stand in jeopardy every hour. This fact is accepted by some as a proof of the defectiveness of things in general, and they find it difficult to believe that the world was created by divine wisdom or that it is superintended by that wisdom. Certain mechanism is sometimes described as being "fool proof"; that is, the machine is so constructed that the most stupid operator cannot readily mar it nor very well injure himself. We have critics who think that this world ought to have been "fool proof"; that it ought not to have been easy to hurt ourselves: we ought to have water that would not drown, fire that would not burn, gases that would not explode. We do not know what are the possibilities of creation; but if a "fool proof" world were possible, we can readily see what the intellectual calibre of its tenants would be. Through the fact and imminence of danger our

faculties are disciplined, and thus we have attained strength and acuteness of body and mind. This is equally applicable to our higher life and its development. Were it impossible for us to go wrong, we should not be men at all. The constitution of things does not tempt us to do wrong, nature is pervaded by benign safeguards ; yet the possibility of transgression and penalty is the condition of our greatness and its perfecting. The world was not designed as an asylum for amiable stupidity, but as the training-ground of the thoughtful, the wise, the humble, the obedient ; and such are educated into perfection through difficulty and danger.

Yet we are careful to distinguish between the serene courage which best deals with danger and the foolhardiness which courts disaster. The collier descending underground with his safety-lamp has our sympathy whilst he walks warily ; but when he forces his lamp to light his pipe, we only despise and condemn. The line of demarcation between wise conduct in the presence of danger, and recklessness, is generally clear. Sensible men cherish the habit of awareness ; they watch over their health and safety, make the margin between themselves and loss as wide as possible, keep well within the lines chalked out by experience, and risk nothing without adequate cause. On the contrary, the foolish presume on their cleverness ; they confide in luck, graze the rock, swim the river just above the falls, their supreme piquant enter

tainment being "a narrow shave." We see examples of both types alike in daily and in moral life.

Our purpose, then, is to point out that life does not admit of negligence, self-confidence, and venturesomeness; and to urge upon you a close and constant supervision of the soul.

I. TO TREAT NEGLIGENTLY OUR SECRET FAULTS is to become guilty of presumptuous sin. Immediately before our text we listen to the deprecation and appeal, "Who can discern His errors? Clear Thou me from hidden faults." Now, by these errors and secret faults we understand the psalmist to indicate the thought, feeling, and bias which lie back of action, and eventually determine action. In the meditation of the heart, the chambers of the brain, the inclination of the will, action takes its rise and colour; and at this initial point, in the count of the sacred writer, we ought specially to be on our guard. Out of the heart are the issues of life; and this fountain ought to be kept under constant observation, as the inhabitants of volcanic areas watch the movements and colour of the water in the wells. According to the reasoning of the text and context, out of hidden faults spring presumptuous sins, out of presumptuous sins dominant sins, out of dominant sins the great transgression of final apostasy. Medical authority teaches that elephantiasis is sometimes occasioned by the bite of a mosquito; and the student of morals well knows that as the most

monstrous physical maladies arise in microscopic life, so the foulest sins originate in obscure errors of the mind, in distempered imaginations, in morbid feeling, in a bias of the will so faint as easily to escape notice. As St. James diagnoses the situation, each man is tempted when drawn away by his irregular desire, and enticed ; then, the irregular desire having conceived, beareth sin ; and sin, becoming full grown, brings forth death. The point of the psalmist, then, is this—that so soon as we discern in thought, emotion, or conduct anything irregular, false, unhealthy, we ought promptly to take ourselves to task.

Yet how lightly we treat these beginnings of evil in our mental and emotional life ! Crimson crimes are of such stuff as dreams are made of ; but such dreams are disregarded as being no more serious than the dreams of the night. We count them of little consequence ; unconcernedly we pass over the morbid symptoms of sensation, reflection, and feeling ; we dismiss them as a negligible quantity. How differently do we act in relation to physical signs of unhealthiness, although those signs are of the faintest ! Then we are, indeed, quick to discern and prompt to act. *Slight Ailments* is the title of a work by a distinguished physician. Its design is to describe the symptoms of incipient maladies, to show how serious ailments arise out of slight ones, and to direct the treatment that these ominous signs demand. It is unnecessary to say that this work is popular ;

that it has gone through many editions. If we have the slightest reason to suspect ourselves of being unsound, if we discover any tendency in our constitution towards one or another malady, we at once take the matter in hand, whatever may be the cost or inconvenience. "Despise no new accident to your body, but take opinion of it," writes Lord Bacon. How readily we accept his advice! We do not delay until the disturbing symptoms give place to decided maladies like cancer or consumption. We are admonished by the novel weakness, the unusual pain, the nebulous sign, and satisfy ourselves as to what the "accident" signifies, and how it may best be dealt with. Did we not act thus, we should before long bitterly reflect upon ourselves. Ought we not to follow the same course touching the appearance of sinister signs in our spiritual and moral life? to note any new accident of the soul, and ask opinion of it?

What do these unwonted motions of pride mean? what this unusual strength and clamouring of appetite, these surprises of petulance and temper—what do they imply? What is the significance of my growing restlessness, impatience, and discontent? What does this constant gravitation of my heart towards earthly treasure pre-  
 sage? How is this failure of interest in sacred things to be explained? this weariness in well-doing? Am I conscious of a dullness of the inward hearing, a dimness of interior vision, a loss



of spiritual appetite? and if so, what account can I give myself of these serious phases of experience? Whence come these moods of unbelief, these motions of jealousy and envy, this more obtrusive self-will, this chilled enthusiasm, this growing habit of hesitation and stumbling? The soul may be "off colour," as the body is; and surely we ought to mark the first tokens of moral and spiritual degeneration, to ascertain of what they are symptomatic, and to submit them to the eye of the great Physician who healeth all our diseases. Let us emulate the delicate conscientiousness of the psalmist, ever watching and regulating the springs of conduct. Let his prayer continually be on our lips: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

II. TO DESPISE THE BEGINNINGS OF HABIT is to become chargeable with presumptuous sin. The psalmist has here in view the terrible power of evil habit. "Let them not have dominion over me." St. Paul refers to the same hateful domination: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof." The ancients were only too familiar with tyranny, with its humiliations and cruelty; but they knew no despotism that was so terrible as that of a soul mastered by base desire: the tyranny that outrages reason, puts out the eyes of the heart, silences the conscience, fastens fetters on the will,



and thrusts human nature in its inmost self into the bitterest bondage and degradation. To acquiesce in the lordship of lust, or to attempt in unavailing revolt to break its fetters, is the deepest depth of subjection and misery we may know. Of all the bitter cries that go up to heaven, no cry of anguish is more intense than that of the moral slave dominated by passions and habits which hold him in an iron grip. Appetite, pride, covetousness, selfishness, temper, dominating the man, making sport of his good resolutions, denying his better judgment and instincts, and coercing him to be and do what in his heart of hearts he utterly abhors: is there anything sadder than this? Yes, one thing; and that is the same slave so utterly subdued that he cries out no longer against the vile passions which degrade and destroy, but acquiesces in their thralldom helplessly, hopelessly.

The argument of the psalmist is to put us on our guard against this monstrous tyranny. He warns us to be watchful at the point where thought and sentiment first seek to establish themselves in action. We are not to tamper with the tyrant, lest in the end he captures and enslaves us. Our first dalliances with evil may be of trifling aspect, but we are guilty of criminal imprudence to tamper with it at all. And is not the psalmist right in seeking to guard us against the first faint deeds of evil? We can never overrate the immense significance of the first words and acts leading on to

habit. In physics we see that the lightest crease or scratch has marvellous determining value. A tear in paper accurately follows the line of the directive crease; the crease may be faint in the extreme, but the rent will commence there and follow the line of indentation. If a groove is filed on the surface of a sheet of glass, the slightest jar will divide it, and divide it at the groove although it is only a scratch. The first trifling acts in human life possess similar significance; they exercise an influence upon the future altogether beyond their immediate importance.

The effect of a deed, of a deed repeated a few times, is immense and often final. It does much to settle the lines on which after-thought finds it easy to follow; it ploughs the channel in which henceforth emotion naturally flows. The physiologist is aware how first movements affect the particles, tissues, and nerves of the body, establishing tendency. The psychologist knows that initial acts impart a bent to the powers and passions of our mental and emotional nature. And the moralist emphasizes the dominant influence of early action on will, conscience, and character. As Amiel states it: "Almost everything comes from almost nothing, one might think. It is only the first crystallization which is the affair of mind; the ultimate aggregation is the affair of mass, of attraction, of acquired momentum, of mechanical acceleration." The cherished thought of evil, its first articulation, its earliest manifestation in

irregular action, in a wonderful degree prepare the way for extreme transgression. The most considerable step that we take in any journey is the step over the threshold.

Let us not be guilty of presumptuous sin in yielding to the temerity which trifles with the beginnings of evil. The crease may be barely discernible, but there character will be rent; the scratch may be inappreciable, but here the soul will be shattered, and, perchance, cast with the rubbish to the void! Snap, then, the spider-thread ere it become a cord of vanity, a cart-rope to drag the tyrant's chariot and the executioner's tumbril. Block the track ere the lawless thought establish a right of way. Quench the kindling spark ere you perish in the impure flame of an infernal martyrdom. "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

III. TO EXPOSE OURSELVES UNNECESSARILY TO TEMPTATION is an egregious form of presumption. We have already spoken of those wanton persons who are never happy except when courting danger in some shape or other; and this folly finds its parallel in the spiritual life. Surely temptation enough arises out of natural, legitimate life, inevitable dangers stand thick through all the ground; and yet we madly multiply peril to the soul, as the hare-brained will graze the grave. How rashly we expose ourselves to sceptical influences! How heedlessly we take

on worldly entanglements ! How apt we are to minimize the perils of passion, feeding without fear !

And nothing is to be gained by this temerity. In ordinary life, when men run serious risks, something of consequence stands to be won. Whenever one goes forth with a shroud under his arm to attempt any enterprise, he has, as a rule, an adequate prize in view, or at least thinks that he has. Alfred Nobel, the famous inventor of explosives, lived for years dealing with the most dangerous substances and making experiments fraught with peril. He was ever handling terrible compounds like nitro-glycerine, gunpowder, dynamite, blasting glycerine, gun-cotton, blasting gelatine, cordite, and any hour might have been blown to atoms. He habitually faced death in its most terrible forms. But this hazardous life was redeemed by a great purpose. The brave experimentalist sought to solve important problems, and to equip the engineer with forces that might the sooner establish the pathway of civilization. He who in a dare-devil spirit sports with gunpowder, cordite, or dynamite is a fool.

To dabble with any forbidden thing in the moral life is inexcusable folly ; for it does not, and it cannot, bring any advantage whatever. The wounds received in the service of sin carry no honour ; the ventures made at the bidding of vicious caprice yield no profit ; the forbidden precipices we climb with bleeding feet only render

our folly the more conspicuous and our punishment the more complete. "What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." What fools we are! How incurable is our folly! Shall we never learn that there is nothing worth having beyond the hedge? Everything good for the body; everything in nature, art, science, literature, adventure, that gives intellectual entertainment and delight; whatever society bestows of love and joy; the world, genius, life, the affluence of the present, the splendour of hope, all are ours within the lines of reason and righteousness; yet in very wantonness we break bounds and trespass on ground where we stand to lose everything! To put our great life into pawn at the bidding of arrogant recklessness is the supreme infatuation.

"Moreover by them is Thy servant warned"; and what is needed is simply teachableness, dutifulness. It is not so much that we require sublime wisdom to preserve us, measures of heroic strength, or mystical endowments of any kind; we need in moral life, to a very large extent, only to exercise the good sense we display in dealing with the common dangers of daily life. This is certainly the view of St. Paul. "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise. . . . Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. v. 15, 17). Do not become foolish, mindless, witless, as re-

guards the difficulties and pitfalls of life ; use common sense, sanctified common sense. In the public parks we are warned, "Keep off the grass" ; in the museums, "Do not touch" ; in the Zoölogical Gardens, "Do not tease the animals." In America, at the entrance to various buildings, you are admonished, "Keep out." It requires no scholarship, philosophy, or mysticism to understand these curt instructions ; our duty is so clear that a child can understand, and a fool need not err. But the instructions of God's Word are just as explicit ; and all that we need is implicitly to obey them, not as fools, but as wise. If a place is doubtful, keep out ; if a book is tainted, let it alone ; if a path leads astray, turn from it, and pass away ; and if you are in doubt as to the legitimacy and safety of any suggested course, give yourself the benefit of the doubt and refrain. Knowing that all precious things are ours in knowledge, virtue, and godliness, and knowing what the will of the Lord is, let us walk circumspectly, sensibly, and we shall walk surely.

IV. TO ENCOUNTER THE INEVITABLE PERILS OF LIFE WITHOUT DUE PREPARATION is a sin of presumption. Nothing in nature is more remarkable than the way in which the creatures are fortified against their enemies ; and it is noted that their defensive armour becomes more exquisite and complete as their assailants increase in power and efficiency. Cacti are preserved by



formidable spines. Protective mechanics of a most complicated order are found in a number of plants. All kinds of ingenious weapons are developed by flower, insect, and animal ; just the armour that best suits them, being finely adjusted to the severity of their environment. Thus God has not left His people without a "whole armour" ; it would be strangely unlike Him if He had. And that armour is found in the intensity and fullness of their spiritual life. The armour of the saint is not something exterior and artificial : it is the protection that springs from the reality, intensity, and healthiness of the life of the soul. It is in the grasp of the truth by the understanding, in the sensibility of the conscience to righteousness, in the warmth of the heart's love, in the clearness of the vision of the eternal, in the strength of our trust in God, and in the completeness of our consecration to Him. Here is the invulnerable panoply of the saints.

It is exactly here, too, that we are often chargeable with presumption. We neglect, we let down, the vigour of the soul ; and in so doing venture into a dangerous world without due equipment. With sandals, sword, helmet, belt, or breastplate missing, we venture into the midst of wily and truculent foes. With unpardonable levity we allow ourselves to become weak and defenseless, although we stand in jeopardy every hour. If the cactus in the desert starved its spines, it would perish by browsing beast. If the wild rose dared

for a season to bloom without its thorns, cattle would make short work of it. If bird or butterfly wantonly omitted its protective colour, it would furnish a feast to its foe. If the creeping thing of the sea ventured forth into the abyss without its shell, it would inevitably perish. Yet we court disaster by permitting degeneration in the armour of the soul. By default of thought, prayer, vigilance, discipline, we put ourselves in infinite peril. Let us, then, continually saturate our mind with the light and power of God's holy law, and ever be ready to draw upon our enemies the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Let our loins be belted with truth ; let the corselet of righteousness be daily burnished ; our feet shod with preparedness. Let us afresh each morning receive from God's hands the helmet of salvation. Over all, let us buckle upon ourselves the shield of faith, which quenches every fiery arrow. With all prayer and supplication complete the magical panoply. To sally forth upon the field of strife with heedlessness, with a cold heart, weak faith, and vacillating purpose, is to invite calamity. We are immune just as we live in the spirit of watchfulness, consecration, enthusiasm, in the power of purity and love.

Thus living, however, we *are* immune, and may live in absolute confidence and serenity. Dangers stand thick through all the ground, yet is the sincere soul safe as though in heaven itself. The wife of the celebrated physician, Sir William

Priestley, was a strenuous advocate of the theories of Pásteur, and in her book entitled *The Story of a Lifetime* she describes a dinner given at her house to enable Mr. Chamberlain to meet some of Pásteur's disciples and to become acquainted with his methods. "On entering the drawing-room after dinner, Mr. Chamberlain had the felicity of finding himself, for the first time in his life, in a veritable museum of living disease. On every side were glass tubes, with nothing between himself and a variety of contagious diseases but cotton-wool stoppers. Standing in the presence of this awe-inspiring world, Chamberlain was not afraid.' No, these gentlemen were not afraid; they gaily talked and laughed, although meeting in a veritable museum of horrors, amid tubes containing flourishing families of disease, plates smeared with gelatine containing microbes of various kinds, and microscopes through which could be seen the bacilli when taken fresh from the blood of disease-stricken men or animals. Only a frail particle of cotton-wool separated them from the ghastliest plagues; yet it was enough. This narrative is a parable of our moral situation and peril. The world in which perforce we dwell and act is a museum of living disease; everything is infested with contagion; we are threatened by a thousand deaths: yet are we perfectly secure. The ethereal defenses by which God renders His sincere children immune are sufficient. We may live in perfect confidence and peace, enjoying without a dis-

turbing thought all the pleasant things life has to give. The God of our salvation can seal "the pit of the abyss" with an electron, render a bubble a fortress, hedge us in with a gossamer ; or, to drop the imagery, the altogether invisible and intangible action of divine grace will secure the absolute safety of all who are pure in heart, even though Pandemonium seethe around them. "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day ; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand ; but it shall not come nigh thee. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

## IX

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION

*He preached Jesus and the resurrection.*—Acts xvii. 18.

THE Athenians were evidently not very clear as to the distinction existing between the person of Christ and the doctrine of the Resurrection. They seem to have confused the resurrection with the foreign divinities whom they charged Paul with setting forth; they appear to have thought the resurrection a distinct entity, one of the foreign demons. But the fact of their thus describing the ministry of the apostle shows what a prominent place the doctrine of the Resurrection occupied in that ministry; "Jesus" was evidently a conspicuous theme in his preaching, and "the resurrection of the dead" was not less a salient feature. The two subjects went together in the grand apostolic message. And they go together in the Epistles. The fact and import of the resurrection of Christ, and of the resurrection of His people in Him, are interwoven with all the writings of the apostles, as they were evidently interwoven with all their preaching. First, then, the resurrection of our Lord was to the apostles a great, fundamental, essential fact. They know

nothing of the resurrection as a myth, to be treated poetically ; it is an assured and glorious historic fact, on the truth of which they were prepared to stake everything for time and eternity.

The fact of Christ's resurrection being thus understood as actual and literal, let us ask, then, what are the great truths it implies and symbolizes? When we speak of the resurrection of our Lord, what are its vital significations? The obvious reply to this is, it demonstrates the essential greatness of human nature, despite its deepest humiliation ; it is the symbol of immortality, the condition of our justification and sanctification, and the promise and pledge of our individual resurrection and glorification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ has thrown a splendid light on human nature, and given us a new sense of self-respect : by depriving death of its sting and the grave of its victory, it has delivered us from the paralyzing power of fear ; it has vivified all human thought and life by a mighty hope which shall not make us ashamed.

The resurrection of our Lord, thus recognized as historic fact, has demonstrated its power in some other resurrections, of several of which we now wish to speak. These other resurrections are mighty witnesses to the fact and glory of the primal historic resurrection.

I. First, then, mark the power of Christ's resurrection IN THE SPHERE OF TRUTH. We are accustomed to speak of truth as though it were always necessarily a living thing, incapable of in-



ertia and frustration. We deceive ourselves on this matter with quite a number of aphorisms. "Truth is mighty, and it will prevail," is one of these maxims from which we derive great consolation. As though truth were always invincible, aggressive, realizing, prevailing! Yet what is clearer than the fact that truths, and the very greatest truths, remain for ages utterly impotent and unavailing? They are moribund, they do not live and make live, they are mere mummies in the necropolis of dusty libraries; the antiquary occasionally gets a glimpse of them as they sleep in their painted shrouds and gilded caskets, but they exhibit no longer the mystery and majesty of living things; they are occasionally recalled in the memory of successive generations; their ghosts flit through the imagination of men, they are formally acknowledged and revered, but they do not interest, inspire, restrain, actuate, command, and compel. Now, in this sphere of inanimate truth the power of Christ's resurrection is marvellously displayed.

Mark its revivifying action upon Judaism. Compared with the religions of the surrounding nations, the faith of the Jew was preëminent; its revelation of the righteous God, its insistence on the principle of holiness, its foreshadowing of immortality, invested it with unique authority and glory. Yet in course of time it "waxed old," it became ineffective and obstructive, it cumbered the ground, and the torch of Titus cremated it.

But in the resurrection of Jesus Christ Judaism arose from its ashes in transfiguration splendour. Its sacred literature palpitated with a strange power; from being a petrification, its temple became a living Church; its laws were vivified by the law of the spirit of life; from the insignificance of a provincial cult, it passed into supreme and universal authority and influence. "The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit."

A while ago, in one of the newspapers, there was a discussion entitled, "Do we Believe?" Dr. Hermann Gollancz, a distinguished Jewish authority, complained that the Bishop of London imputed the civilizing influence which had been felt in the world through past ages to the action of Christian truth. The rabbi contended that the claim of Hebraism was supreme, and that Judaism should be substituted for Christianity, the Bible for the Gospel. Yet, surely, history is altogether on the side of the bishop. The civilization of to-day has certainly not arisen from the action of the Old Testament, or from any influence exerted by the Hebrew nation. It was only in the ministry of the apostles who "proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead," that Judaism became a missionary power, a converting and civilizing power; only at Pentecost was it clothed upon from above, becoming a lifting and driving power, the power of God unto salvation. "The outgrown shell was left by life's unresting sea,"

and we entered "a new temple, nobler than the last," one filled with an excelling glory. Judaism spiritualized, energized, glorified in Christ Jesus, became the supreme factor in the moral life of mankind. He who is the Resurrection and the Life, called it forth from its temple tomb and winding-sheet of formalism to world-conquering power. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

Once more. Only as the gospel of the Resurrection is preached in heathen lands will the various faiths of the pagan pass into fulfillment. The students of comparative religion remind us of the divine doctrine found in the ethnic scriptures; they abundantly prove that these scriptures contain many great truths expressed with remarkable lucidity and beauty. But those best acquainted with the East declare that these ancient faiths no longer serve the nations which hold them; they are practically dead so far as concerns any influence they might once have exerted upon the moral and spiritual life of the people. It is, then, only as the truths implied in the resurrection of Christ are proclaimed that these incomplete and inoperative faiths will reach their consummation. It was by this thought that St. Paul was guided in dealing with the Athenians. He recognized the merit and failure of their natural theology,

and "preached Jesus and the resurrection" as the fullness of the truth after which they were striving. So will it be with the present moribund faiths of the Oriental nations: they will find their consummation in becoming related to the gospel of the Resurrection. Only as the Christian missionary tells of the love of God who gave His Son to die for our sins, of His rising from the grave for our justification; of the power of the ascended Lord to raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; of the eternal blessedness which awaits the believer through union with Him who is the Resurrection and the Life—only as these truths are told out with conviction and love will the creeds of Paganism awake to a higher life and efficacy. Whatever in them is false will be purged; whatever is true will be energized; whatever is partial will be completed. Christ "came not to destroy, but to fulfill"; and as He raised Judaism into a spiritual and heavenly glory, so will He swallow up the great native faiths of Paganism in an excelling glory of truth and grace. The splendid change that passed over the faith of the Jew will pass over the faith of the Parsee, the Buddhist, the Confucian, the Mohammedan! The Lord Jesus "shall fashion anew the body of their humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself."

Again, many truths held by our scientists, statesmen, philosophers, and social reformers as-

sert themselves feebly, if they assert themselves at all. They are called by Lord Bacon "bedridden truths"; but they are even worse than that: they lie frigid and passive in shrouds, coffins, and catacombs; if not forgotten as dead men, they move society no more than do the dead. What will give them life? The enforcement and reception of the doctrines symbolized by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the great truths latent in Paganism, discussed by philosophy, illustrated by science, inculcated by sociology and legislation, are to become authoritative and fruitful, they will have to be related to God, rooted in the eternal righteousness, energized by divine grace, vivified by the hope of immortality. All the truths which concern human character and society are reborn in the quickened consciousness of God, in the sympathetic knowledge of Christ's love and power, and in the assured faith of eternal life. Truths that have hitherto been mere notions revolving idly in the imagination become ideals, convictions, enthusiasms, working out in practical life their blessed consequences. In a real sense these resuscitated verities declare with the Master, "I am the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore." They are no longer bedridden, tenants of the charnel-house, bound with grave-clothes; their eyes are as flames of fire, their feet like fine brass burning in a furnace, their voice majestic as the sound of many seas. So much truth is paralyzed and powerless because

it has been divorced from the love, righteousness, and promise of the living God ; and it is only as the risen Christ relates it once more to God and eternity, and baptizes it with fire, that it lives, flashes, kindles, coerces, consumes, and transfigures.

II. Consider the power of Christ's resurrection as demonstrated IN THE SPHERE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The great design of the Advent was to establish among us a divine righteousness ; and the distinct teaching of the New Testament is, that in Christ's death lies the destruction of sin, and in His resurrection the power of holiness. Everywhere in the New Testament the Resurrection enforces the claims of righteousness. It does not address our curiosity as clearing up certain intellectual problems which perplex us ; nor does it excite the imagination with dramatic splendours, as it might so easily have done ; but it appeals directly and exclusively to the conscience. It calls for righteousness—sincere, essential, living righteousness in spirit and conduct. "We were buried therefore with Him through baptism unto death ; that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." Purity of the body, of the life, of the mind, such purity as will bear the divine eye, is the obvious implication of the Resurrection.

Speaking of Greece, Renan writes : "Her philosophers, while dreaming of the immortality



of the soul, were tolerant towards the iniquities of this world.”<sup>1</sup> How diametrically opposed to the method of the apostles! With them the immortality of the soul passed from a dream into a supreme article of faith; and they never for a moment failed to employ it as a grand moral dynamic: they became more than ever intolerant towards the iniquities of this world, and in the vaster horizon that had opened to them they found a splendid inspiration making possible a holiness which the faint consolations of Paganism could neither prompt nor sustain. Hardly ever, if ever, do the apostles refer to the great hope of the future, assured in the resurrection of Christ, without making it an incitement to sanctification.

Yes, by His resurrection from the dead our Lord filled the whole moral sphere with prevailing energy. How fatally weak were the moral systems of the ancients! The greatest historians admit the emptiness and hypocrisy of the morality of Greece and Rome. And our Lord showed convincingly the defects of the moral teaching and conduct of the Pharisees as He subjected them to the limelight of His searching criticism. But, turning to the New Testament, we are conscious that a new moral force has entered into the world. By His triumph over sin and death, which all who believe in Him are to share; by revealing the love of God, and thus pouring heavenly fire into the human heart; by infinite consolations and en-

<sup>1</sup> *History of the People of Israel.*

couragements; by converting the intimation of immortality into a glorious certainty, Jesus Christ brought new motives, inspirations, attractions, enthusiasms, into the sphere of human life and duty, rendering absolute obedience to the moral law possible and delightful. Captain Scott, in *The Voyage of the "Discovery,"* graphically describes the beautiful ice flowers which are a feature of the Arctic regions. He relates how these flowers of the frost stand up clear-cut and perfect in form, the mathematical precision of their delicate tracery being wonderful, and the more nearly they are examined the more astonishing do they appear. Nothing in science, we are assured, is more poetical than a garden of exquisite ice flowers radiant with prismatic colours as they are touched by the sun. It cannot, however, be conceded that these snow blossoms are alive. A romantic scientist hazards the opinion that they *are* alive; he argues that as ice crystals arrange themselves in precisely the same way as the cells of living plants do, we must enlarge our definition of living matter and reckon these crystallizations as alive. It will, however, be long before scientists agree to identify electro-magnetic phenomena with life. No; there is a whole universe of difference between the mechanically fabricated bloom of the frost, and the vital, pulsating, fragrant flower of the field.

But are not these ice flowers of the Arctic seas a parable of the moral systems of Jew and Greek, of

Hindu and Chinese, and of the utilitarian morality of our own day? "Clear-cut and perfect in form," of "mathematical precision," often touched with "the prismatic colours" of imagination and emotion, are the maxims and systems of the philosophical moralists; but the mystic element called life is missing—despite all their correctness and poetry these codes of conduct are rootless, sapless, scentless. How different are morals in the sphere of which the risen Christ is the central light! Captain Scott records that it was on one Easter Sunday that he witnessed the grandest display of the ice flowers. "This is a season of flowers, and behold! they have sprung up about us as by magic: very beautiful ice flowers, waxen white in the shadow, but radiant with prismatic colours where the sun-rays light on their delicate petals." On Easter Day the Sun of Righteousness arose on the frosted moral universe, turning its ghostly winter flowers into summer flowers—pulsating with life, rich in energy, radiant with beauty, perfumed with delight, and distilling virtue for the healing of the nations. On that morning a breath of life, a thrill of power, stirred the whole realm of morals, and every law and precept of righteousness felt the quickening Spirit. The Lord of life brought the strengthening of a great assurance, the vitalizing of a mighty hope, the inspiration of a burning love, the baptism of a heavenly power, and henceforth righteousness awoke to a new life of authority and triumph. As

the resurrection body excels in splendour the carcase laid in the dust, so the holiness of the New Testament exceeds the righteousness of Stoic, Epicurean, and Pharisee. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

III. The power of Christ's resurrection as demonstrated IN THE SPHERE OF CIVILIZATION. According to Carlyle, "A nation of degraded men cannot be raised up except by what we rightly name a miracle." This is the doctrine of Scripture. A nation of degraded men can be raised only by a miracle, and that miracle is the resurrection of our Lord, which gives to the people a new conception of themselves, awakes in them lofty hopes, and opens to them new fountains of moral strength. The nations will not be saved by any number of little political tricks; nothing short of a resurrection suffices for their regeneration and glorification, and their resurrection becomes an accomplished fact in the power of Christ's resurrection.

Many preachers to-day ignore in their ministry the great evangelical facts and doctrines, because they think that something practical and immediate is wanted. The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is supposed to be far away from the pressing, practical needs of the people; so they leave the unfruitful dogma, and betake themselves to the

setting forth of economic theories and the discussion of political policies. In fact, our Lord's resurrection lies at the very root of all social, political, and industrial problems. How strikingly this comes out at Pentecost! "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. *And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*; and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there among them any that lacked; for as many as were possessed of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need." How significantly the doctrine of the Resurrection stands at the centre of this passage! Has it not a great moral for our day? The vital truths symbolized by the resurrection of our Lord contain the solution of the wage question, the land question, and the rest of the social and economic questions which shallow reformers vainly strive to settle irrespective of the spiritual truths which underlie all human society. He is the truest reformer who preaches most powerfully to the soul, and sets all life in the light of the Resurrection.

Perhaps the most touching sight we ever witnessed was the crowd of Russian pilgrims at the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. Those peasants

travelled thousands of miles and braved untold hardships that they might behold the sacred place. With intense eagerness, with profoundest reverence, with tears streaming down their cheeks, they sought and kissed the sacred shrine. With their poverty and sorrow, bleeding under many injustices, aspiring after liberty and privilege, they had found their way to the Lord's tomb. Their instinct was true. The power to raise a nation of trampled and degraded men is in the truths symbolized by that sepulchre and in the pentecostal power of the risen Lord. That we are the sons of God ; that the risen Lord is our Elder Brother ; that in His Spirit we find the might to subdue the passions by which we are degraded ; that in Him we are called to the highest righteousness and felicity ; that we, too, are the children of the Resurrection—these are the doctrines which stir the soul of the nations, and which will not permit them to sleep in the dust. Let these dynamic beliefs work in a people like a leaven, and revolutions and resurrections are sure to follow. The vision of Ezekiel, the vision of the dry bones, represented primarily the resurrection of the Jewish State ; and it represents the emancipation, the uplifting, the transfiguring of all the nationalities by the breath of the redeeming God.

The trumpet of the Gospel proclaiming the truth of Easter Sunday is the trumpet of national resurrection. The great truths of the empty grave



are at the bottom of all the restlessness and aspiration of the people, and that resurrection is now in process. The whole world is heaving like a churchyard aroused by the last trump. If the popular conception of the final resurrection is correct, the day of the Lord will prove a great and terrible day. Costly coffins will be rent, precious marbles shattered, stately obelisks overthrown, superb mausoleums wrecked, prim graveyards strewn with sad disorder; but the dead will rise! Humanity cannot be clothed upon with its house which is from heaven except through mighty convulsions and sorrows. Thrones must totter, crowns be rent, dynasties fail; but the dead shall arise, and the prostrate nations stand on their feet. That resurrection is now being accomplished; the dry bones are astir; they that have dwelt in the dust are awaking and putting on the glory of the higher life. Old things are passing away; all things are becoming new. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."

## X

### CHRIST AND ABNORMAL LIFE

*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*—LUKE XIX. 10.

IN the reckoning of our Lord no moral distinction existed between men, some being right and safe, whilst others needed salvation; His whole teaching, as indeed the teaching of the New Testament throughout, goes on the assumption that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that all equally stand in need of redeeming grace. We think, however, this narrative contains special teaching on this matter. On the morning of the day on which Christ entered Jericho Zacchæus appeared the least likely man in all the city to become the penitent host of Jesus Christ, and yet it was exactly to the house of the publican that salvation came. The particular lesson here, then, is that we must not despair of the salvation of any, however unpromising they may look or be.

In certain quarters it is argued that some men are constitutionally destitute of religious susceptibilities, and it is therefore hopeless to address to them any religious appeal or to expect their salvation. If a man is born without the æsthetic sense,

we are not able to make him an artist ; if he has no ear for sound, we cannot educate him into a musician ; if he is destitute of imagination, he will never become a poet ; and if he comes into the world without spiritual and moral genius, we vainly attempt his conversion. Let us, then, seek to show that none are born without the highest susceptibilities and possibilities, that the most obtuse and unpromising of men are capable of salvation, and that Jesus Christ can and does in an extraordinary degree evoke the spirituality of the most selfish, sensual, and sinful of our race. He "came to seek and to save that which was lost," to do the impossible in the reckoning of the carnal mind. As a hive in winter is sometimes full of dead bees, so is human nature full of suppressed faculties which are quickened into glorious action by Him who is the resurrection and the life.

I. In the most unpromising is REASON. And when we speak of reason, we do not mean so much the logical faculty, but reason on its spiritual side : the spiritual imagination, perception, and sensibility which recognize God and the eternal universe. The rationality of men, thus understood, survives irrational conduct. They may narrow their reason by occupying themselves with trifles, pervert it by sophistries and scepticisms, debase it by sensual living ; but the majestic faculty is there if only it can be reached. We have an illustration of this in the first chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with

iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly : they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and gone backward." "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it ; but wounds and bruises, and festering sores." Their "hands are full of blood." Heaven averts its face when they pray, and spurns their vain oblations and solemn meeting. Sixteen verses of terrible accusation and conviction ! And what is the next verse ? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The divine faculty was unextinguished. Monstrously wronged, its majesty outraged, its counsels set at nought, the noble oracle still survived, and to it heaven immediately appeals.

The same sublime faculty is existent in the most unpromising of our fellows to-day. The Spirit of God keeps the spiritual reason alive in men—the sense of God, righteousness, and immortality—even when it might be thought that all such elements had perished through neglect and disobedience. Bates, in his *Travels on the Amazon*, tells of his astonishment in discovering, when far in the interior, a slight rise and fall of the water in a small creek which traversed the forest. He was nearly six hundred miles up country, and he hesitated to believe that at such a distance it was possible for

the sea to make itself felt. But it was really so. "Yes, the tide! the throb of the great oceanic pulse felt far away in a remote corner," leagues away from the place where the sea strikes the mouth of the Amazon. Similarly, humanity may lose sight of God and wander in the darkest and remotest depths of the far country; yet it is still conscious of the throb of the eternal.

Who like Christ can evoke the spiritual reason of the irrational? In the days of His flesh He elicited in a wonderful manner the reason of the ignorant and prejudiced, the sensual, sceptical, and deranged; even the demoniac sat at His feet clothed and in his right mind. The denser the brain, the greater must be the teacher. And to-day the word of Christ finds and evokes the spiritual sense of the most unpromising. Gross indulgence, stolid selfishness, perverse pride seriously cloud the faculty by which we apprehend the highest things; yet, diseased and deranged, the organ is still there, and Christ is the opener of the eyes of men born blind. Why does He thus beyond all others pierce to the soul and arouse the most abnormal intelligence? Because He is incarnate Reason, and in His presence the divine element in us awakes, our reason acknowledges Him and responds to His claim, and we know that He who thus reveals the soul can save it.

If we to-day are to move men, we must remember their greatness and appeal to their spiritual sense, even when they have fallen the lowest.

One of our statesmen recently declared to a religious assembly that if the modern Church is to make any impression upon the masses it must "appeal to the infinity that is in them." Yes, we must go to them with something above and beyond appeals to their temporal welfare ; we must urge upon them great truths, ideals, motives, hopes ; we must appeal to the infinity that is in them. If we do this, if in Christ's name and spirit we challenge their spiritual consciousness, their sense of the divine and eternal, we cannot appeal in vain.

II. In the most unpromising is CONSCIENCE. Like reason, conscience long survives neglect and maltreatment. Its counsels are disregarded, its authority flouted, its exquisite sense dulled, yet a divine overshadowing preserves it alive and ready for action in the critical hour. What a striking illustration of this is given in the opening of the Epistle to the Romans ! Here a terrible picture is drawn of the condition of the two great divisions of mankind. Burke said that it was difficult to draw up an indictment against a whole nation, but the apostle draws up an indictment against the race. He gives a terrible picture of the classic age. Every touch deepens the darkness ; and the picture, when finished, is unutterably distressing. "They were filled with all unrighteousness, covetousness, maliciousness ; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity." They were given up to a reprobate mind, and became guilty of whatsoever was inhuman, base, and obscene. The apostle then



maintained that substantially the Jew is no better than the Gentile. What immediately follows this tremendous impeachment? The question of conscience. The Jew has the law both within him and without; and as for the Gentiles, "they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them." Throughout the mighty moral debasement which prevailed, conscience continued to do its office, and to this organ of righteousness Paul made his confident appeal. And to-day, whatever the wickedness of men, we may always assume with equal confidence that there is still within them a living law contending for truth and purity.

Once again, let us remark upon the wonderful power of Christ to awake the moral sense of the most unpromising. We have just said that He calls forth morbid reason because He is incarnate Reason; let us now affirm that He evokes the most abnormal conscience because He is incarnate Righteousness. What an illustration of Christ's mastery of conscience is given in this very narrative! Think of Zacchæus on the morning of that day! "He was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich." What room for the imagination! Full of guilty gains, and entirely impenitent. In the far North the quicksilver freezes in the thermometer, which of course ceases to register, and whilst the cold continues even for months

and years the instrument remains useless ; but let the temperature rise, and the quicksilver becomes at once nimble and indicative. That morning in Zacchæus the moral quicksilver was frozen, and most likely it had been for years ; he, however, no sooner stood in the white fierce light of embodied righteousness than the quicksilver thawed, conscience acted, and the publican was convicted. "And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore it fourfold." Not a word had been said about his speculations ; yet in the presence of the righteous Lord he voluntarily and promptly made a clean breast of it.

If to-day we are to move the multitude, we must attack the moral sense. The Church of Christ does not primarily appeal to intellect, imagination, or sentiment, but to the conscience. Men must be brought into the presence of the righteous God. "Now mine eye seeth Thee, I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes." We must enforce the imperativeness of the holy commandments, and faithfully set forth the awful consequences of transgression. These doctrines have been softened until they have no edge. We need to address men in the spirit and method of Jesus Christ, who came to "convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment." He who is incarnate Righteousness pierces to the organ of righteousness in the human breast even when that organ seems

utterly aborted, and the guilty one responds, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

III. In the most unpromising of men is AFFECTION. To the natural eye it may sometimes seem as though the faculty of love had been sinned away, and that men had become incapable of fine feeling, of gratitude, affection, loyalty, sacrifice, devotion. We speak of heartless people, and sometimes it seems as if there were such. But really this is never the case. A city missionary has witnessed that what impressed him most in prosecuting his work in dark neighbourhoods was "the goodness of the bad." He meant to say that he was astonished to find how abandoned men and women on occasion would flash out heroism, melt in love, bleed in sacrifice, and, for the moment at least, reveal the purest, kindest, sublimest qualities. Yes, the Spirit of God keeps alive in the most abandoned and hardened of men and women the genius of love, linking them with the upper universe and the higher hope. We need not despair of any; in the worst is a heart capable of the eternal love and of the paradise which grows out of that love. However unpromising the exterior, the heart is there. To escape trouble and waste, pearl-divers are using the Roentgen rays to see whether the oyster contains a pearl or not. But no Roentgen rays are needed to test the human heart; in the roughest shell is a jewel.

What a wonderful power of evoking the latent

divinity of our fallen nature did our Lord exercise! Why? Why did He thus evoke the slumbering possibilities of the heart? What was the secret of His efficacy? Because He came to us with a mighty appeal of affection and sacrifice. We said that Christ aroused the reason of the irrational because He is incarnate Reason; that He stimulates into life drugged, seared, dead consciences because He is incarnate Righteousness: He also kindles into flame, melts into tenderness, the frozen, ossified, petrified heart because He is incarnate Love. It is attested by ten thousand evidences that the love of Christ Crucified awakens love in hearts that other loves fail to touch. The pierced Hand best strikes the missing chord in the human breast.

If the Church of Christ is to prevail, it must not neglect this, its crowning argument and appeal. The love of God as that love is revealed in the Son of God must be our theme. It is not for us primarily to enlarge on the divine love as evidenced in the treasures and splendours of nature; but to set forth the condescending, suffering, bleeding, dying love of Nazareth and Calvary. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The love that pities us in our misery, that wins our trust, that forgives our sin, that purifies and energizes our heart! Love personal, boundless, free, saving to the uttermost, is our grand message. This is the power that penetrates and

masters the most morbid mind, the most abnormal heart. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

IV. In the most unpromising is WILL. It often seems as though men utterly lost will-power to all that is good. If the will is the centre of personality, it looks as though some in human shape were only phantoms. With many fine features, they are yet devoid of resolution. As soon as the opportunity to do evil presents itself, they do it. They appear no more able to resist temptation than a heap of gunpowder to resist a spark. These men and women are the despair of their friends, the despair of philosophers, reformers, and statesmen.

Our Lord always assumed that the most impotent of men possessed will-power, however long it had remained unused. How strikingly this is exhibited in the parable of the Prodigal Son! The youth is swept away by passion, carried into a far country, reduced to the deepest degradation; and yet, awaking to his misery, he cries, "*I will* arise and go to my father." Christ did not put this word into the prodigal's lips without deep purpose. He meant to teach that in the feeblest and most forlorn of sinners resides the majestic faculty by which they may lay hold of God's strength and return to His dwelling-place. And the Saviour appealed to the will of those whom He sought to bless. "What wilt thou I should do to thee?" "Wilt thou be made whole?" He

addressed Himself directly to this faculty, and found response even when it seemed impossible. Already we have said that He was incarnate Reason, incarnate Righteousness, incarnate Love; now He is incarnate Power: and because He is the power of God He evoked the will of the most helpless, and recovered the diseased, the deranged, the palsied, the paralytic, the demoniac. And just as the Church to-day appeals in the name of Jesus to the will of the helpless, the moral cripple stands up, he treads on the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon he tramples underfeet.

It is surprising what fine powers exist in the ruin of the brain, and how they will reveal themselves if only sympathetically excited. The French record a striking story respecting a peasant girl who was repeatedly found guilty of stealing flowers, and in consequence condemned to one of the prisons of Paris. Touching this form of crime the culprit was manifestly insane and incorrigible. A director of prison-labour set the convicts to make artificial flowers, and this demented girl among the rest. She was delighted, enthusiastically making roses from morning to night. As she continued her joyous task her mental maladies ceased, and she was discharged from prison sane and happy, to become one of the most successful florists in Paris. If only the right chord could be struck, and offenders against the social law oftener disciplined along the right lines, may we not believe that such instances of



recovery would be immensely multiplied? Sadly obscured and deranged, the sense of truth, beauty, and power yet survives; and at the prompting of the wise appeal and the just education, these clouded senses joyously reveal themselves. Remove the accidents which deflect and shroud the brain, and reason and goodness shine out in native beauty. Thus Christ treated abnormal humanity. He always proceeded on the assumption that in the worst were the divinest faculties; He addressed Himself confidently to the soul as fully capable of knowledge and righteousness, however its workings had been thwarted by the accidents of flesh and circumstance; and, turning the currents of life into right channels, He made the very passions that had hitherto brought weakness, shame, and misery, to become the elements of strength, glory, and gladness.

We do not believe that one of the great faculties of humanity is missing in any person. They may be sadly obscured, disordered, atrophied, but they are still existent and rich in possibilities. The musician is in us, the artist, the poet, and all we need is adequate stimulation, provocation, solicitation. If Orpheus could play to us, all would be musicians; if Venus were unveiled to our eyes, all would be artists; if Apollo were to descend in our midst, all would be poets. And so all the moral faculties are in us, in every one of us, and what is needed is the presence, the appeal, the inspiration of the sufficient One. The

sufficient One is the Lord Jesus. What Orpheus is to the ear, what Venus is to the eye, what Apollo is to the imagination, that Christ is—ah! and infinitely more—to the reason, the conscience, the affections, the will. He elicits the right mind of the demoniac, He calls forth purest affection in Mary Magdalene, He evokes the conscience in Zacchæus, and in the thief on the cross He awakens the instinct for the divine and immortal. Let no man despair of himself. We may be sepulchres full of dead powers; but Christ is the resurrection and the life, to make us shrines full of living, seeing, soaring, rejoicing thoughts and passions. Let no man despair of his brother. Contact with Christ is the shock that startles the dead, awakening them into glorious life.

It is often charged against the Church of Christ that it does society the gravest disservice by its sympathy with the degenerate and incapable. The most fatal thing of all is to conserve and perpetuate the unfit. What is needed most imperatively to-day is for the nation, or perhaps a federated Europe, to devote itself to the task of breeding from itself a race capable of taking over, and becoming responsible for, the future of life on the planet. The aristocracy of the present, the strong, the clever, the noble, must carefully eliminate the unfit, and seek out of itself to create a still excellent aristocracy of talent, power, and enjoyment. On the contrary, the Church of Christ makes such progress impossible by its patronage

of the impotent, by attempting to secure the survival of the unhealthier types, by contemplating the victory of the abnormal. Could any misconception be greater? The religion of Christ does not seek to perpetuate the unfit, but to make the unfit fit to live; not to multiply the abnormal, but to convert it to rationality and wholeness; not to give ascendancy to the servile and disinherited, but to make every one of them bear the likeness of a king. This is Christ's way to create the new nobility, the aristocracy of the future. "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth." The truth of Christ reveals the greatness and sacredness of the weakest and worst; the grace of Christ converts the weakest and worst into the strongest and noblest. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

## XI

### THE STANDARDIZATION OF CHARACTER

*Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.—EPH. iv. 13.*

THE apostle is treating of the perfection of the Church, yet this involves the possibility of the perfection of the individual member. The mystic supposes that each particle of the aroma of the rose is in the figure of a rose, that the rose-form is itself a series of rose organization; and so a perfect and glorious Church is possible only as its single constituent members are perfect. Governed by the text, let us consider the standard of Christian character, and then look at the perfection of that standard.

I. THE STANDARD OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. "The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Christ Himself is the pattern as He is the perfecter. It is urged by non-Christian critics that we are entirely wrong in making our Lord the pattern and standard of character; they argue that a bodiless ideal is, in every department of thought and action, the truest source of guidance and inspiration. The supreme homage of the soul, the absolute surrender of our being, can

rightly be rendered only to the Perfect, as it haunts us *from within*, as the unembodied Ideal, as the moral measure of creature and Creator alike. To set up Jesus Christ as the embodiment of the moral ideal is to imperil our moral being. Our safety lies in the worship of the Real, the Unembodied, the Invisible, Universal, Diffused, Ever-present, and Always-pressing Moral Ideal, immanent in each of us and in society ; and we are traitors and betrayers if we turn away to any Person, however good. The indefinite, abstract, shadowy thought of perfection is better than any attempted incarnation of it ; indeed, to set before us a concrete image or pattern is to quench inspiration, and forbid high excellence in any direction whatever.

In the cultivation of manners we are told that the ideal is more helpful than example can ever be. Each fashionably disposed person consults the pattern within. The very life of good manners depends upon the direct worship of an unembodied ideal of deportment. It is fatal to imitate or to look to another as a model. Now, is this so? Shakespeare recognizes that the world of fashion has its sanctioned leaders, whose example is closely studied and imitated.

He was indeed the glass  
Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.

The lovers of style consult no interior pattern—they follow the recognized leader of the actual

world of elegance. The world of fashion has always had its embodied ideal, and, could it entice Apollo into visibility, would be only too glad to copy his graces.

Next, we are warned against the fatal effect of setting up an absolute master in art. We are informed that the great painters and poets worship only the Absolute Beauty ; this vision, that at once haunts and eludes, is their only object of reverence. The answer to this is, the artist seeks the ideal in the actual. He represents what he has seen, and renders it with a fidelity that can be verified and appreciated by all. Reynolds did not paint the Universal but the human face and figure ; Gainsborough did not portray the Invisible and Diffused, but the landscape whose splendour we see, whose fragrance we inhale, and to whose music we listen. The imagination has its noble uses, but it never dispenses with actuality ; or, if it does, becomes illegitimate. Suppose Venus were to be incarnated, would not such a manifestation flutter the æsthetical world ? Every lover of the lovely would crowd the privileged centre where the ideal and the actual so strangely and delightfully met. And if artists are helped by the study of the likeness of Venus, as rendered by great masters of marble and colour, would they be confounded by the vision of her breathing self ?

Finally, we are reminded that science rejects authorities ; it does not adore Aristotle, nor worship Kepler ; it grows because it keeps clear of



such idolatry, and follows the gleam. The confusion of thought here need not detain us. No person is, nor can be, the ideal of science, although a scientist may find inspiration in a great brother scientist, as Cuvier worked at his desk with the portrait of Isaac Newton before him. The ideal of science is the embodied truth of the visible universe. The scientist does not seek his ideal within his brain; his ideal is the truth incarnate in the actual world.

In short, in no department is perfection sought through theory, but always in the contemplation of the perfect, as it may be found more or less clearly expressed. The student of manners is not introspective; he is a close observer of the world of etiquette. The lover of art does not exhaust himself on the theory of the beautiful; he becomes a master through the study of masterpieces. Listening to orators, the student of the art of speaking becomes eloquent. And the musician attains distinction, not by dreaming that he can hear the angels sing, but by closely following the lines of sensuous harmony. No one ever gave a definition or description of abstract perfection; none ever found within himself any clear image of it; we pursue perfection through the knowledge of the concrete; and we realize it, so far as it is possible to realize it, in the emulation of the choicest examples we know. It is impossible to dispense with instances and demonstrations, with patterns and examples, with personality and embodiment,

such is the constitution of the human mind. As Edmund Burke affirms in his first letter *On the Regicide Peace*, "And is, then, example nothing? It is everything. Example is the school of mankind, and they will learn at no other."

All this is as true in religion and ethics as in the several departments just named. Here also the abstract must be exhibited in the concrete to become adequately influential. The vast majority of men are sensible of the inefficacy of the elusive moral ideals of philosophers and poets. It is reported of Goethe that "he resolved to live with steady purpose in the Whole, the Good, the Beautiful." Such vague language may have a meaning for the imaginative few; it has, however, as little interest and value for the million as the auroral gleam of a winter's sky. Mrs. Humphrey Ward justly expressed the truth on this matter when she wrote: "There is no approaching the ideal for the masses except through the human life—through one much loved, much trusted soul, to some eternal verity." This is not only correct touching the masses, it is true also of the rarest minds; and the Incarnation is heaven's gracious concession to this organic need of our nature. The unembodied, the invisible, the diffused moral ideal is mental moonshine that warms and ripens nothing; the moral ideal in Jesus Christ is as when the sun goes forth in his strength—it calls forth the response of our moral sense, it enthuses the heart, evokes the will, stirs, energizes, and perfects the whole personality.

Through that much loved, much trusted One we come to eternal verity.

II. THE PERFECTION OF THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD OF CHARACTER. "Till we all attain unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

I. The *loftiness* of the ideal. "The stature of the Christ." The thought of the highest conceivable goodness is here. The apostle had no conception of a perfection transcending that of our Lord. He felt that his Master had given the ages a type of character that was unique, and that His doctrine of righteousness was incomparable. But to-day it has become fashionable to sneer at the New Testament ideal of conduct as lacking elevation, and its censors affect to discover purer and loftier principles. It is not irrelevant to ask how it has come to pass that these theories of a superfine virtue should be forthcoming so liberally in these later days. Classical moralists were not moved to invent strained ideals touching what men ought to be and what they ought to do. Marcus Aurelius writes, "Never hope to realize Plato's Republic. Let it be sufficient that you have in some slight degree ameliorated mankind, and do not think that amelioration a matter of small importance." These old thinkers were so fully persuaded of the frailty of human nature, and the severity of its environment, that they felt no temptation to mock it by extravagant ethical ideals. The simple explanation of the presence amongst

us to-day of these excelling moralists is that Jesus Christ has raised immensely the conception of human nature, and kindled an enthusiasm of righteousness of which the ancients knew nothing.

An old legend relates that once the birds agreed to have a king, and they resolved that the bird which flew the highest should wear the crown. The cunning wren, reckoning that the strength of the eagle would prevail, perched itself on the eagle's back ; and when the royal bird reached its last point of ascension, up went the wren into a height yet beyond. If it is asked how our secular rationalistic moralists came to attempt the thin air of an unaccustomed heaven, the answer is clear—on the eagle wings of the Christian faith. These attempts, however, to surpass the Christian standard have not justified themselves. What became of that wren does not appear ; but the ambitious speculative moralist has certainly not sustained his flight. The New Testament conception of holiness marks the extreme limit of practical conduct. Fifty years ago Positivism challenged the righteousness of God, but its transcending principle of disinterestedness has few to vindicate it to-day. Comte held that his doctrine of loving our neighbour and ignoring ourselves was that of pure altruism, whilst the Christian doctrine of loving our neighbour as ourselves was only a refined selfishness ; but the vast majority of thinking men reject a superfine theory which is discredited the moment it is attempted to apply it to practical

life. The boast that "the morality of Positivism is above our head, whilst the morality of Jesus Christ is beneath our feet," contains a measure of truth; yet we require something under our feet, and the rock that sustains our steps is of more consequence than the rainbow that mocks our eyes.

Pessimism now essays to eclipse the Christian ideal by postulating the Superman. It is indeed unexpected to encounter the doctrines of entire sanctification and glorification in the sphere of infidel philosophy and physiology, yet so it is. Somewhat on the same lines as superior breeds of cattle are produced, a better type of man is to be evolved; which type, however, will not be man at all. What exactly the Superman denotes, and in what his rare excellency will consist, none of his prophets can declare. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." There is obscurity here, definitiveness also; but the perfection of the Superman is a mystery that the angels of his annunciation cannot resolve. Humanity is a temporary bridge to a coming type of which we have not the faintest notion. The pessimistic atheist despairs of human nature as we know it, of this world as we know it; he believes that man is doomed to extinction as one of nature's failures and freaks, and he takes refuge in a vague vision of a new world and race of whose perfection he can tell us noth-

ing. We believe that out of human nature as we know it, and by the power of divine grace as we prove it, we shall "attain unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of Christ"; and we are not likely to exchange this substantial hope for a phosphorescent phantom known as the Superman.

How remarkable is the absolute sanity of Jesus Christ! With all His personal greatness, sublime doctrine, and vastness of outlook and purpose, He never loses sight of the facts of human nature, of the truth of things, of the actualities and possibilities of our life; His loftiest requirements are yet manifestly reasonable and practical. History sufficiently reveals the extreme evil of adopting impossible ideals. What is too bright and good is not good enough; what overleaps itself falls on the other side; what is over-ripe is rotten. Whilst straining after ethical originality and refinement, philosophers and saints have again and again fallen into eccentricity, illusion, and immorality. The New Testament gives no sanction to these aberrations. Men who have more respect for science than for Scripture listen deferentially to Darwin when he affirms that "Natural election never improves an animal beyond its needs"; so they might defer to our Lord, who unfailingly remembers our situation, never enjoining a theoretical perfection incompatible with actual life, and which therefore would not be a perfection at all. Revelation exalts character to heavenly places in



Christ Jesus ; but it never fails to draw the line at the delicate point where the sublime passes into the impossible or the grotesque. The most unlikely thing at this hour is that the Christian ideal of character will be surpassed, or its conception of duty be superseded. To gild Christ's refined gold is to debase the moral currency ; to paint His lily is to poison it ; to add another hue to His rainbow is to blemish the heavens. The splendours of nature are not more beyond the art of sculptors and painters than are the ideals and example of our Lord beyond the rivalries of philosophers and saints.

2. The *fullness* of the Christian ideal. "Unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The fullness of Christ as a revelation of humanity is a favourite theme with St. Paul. Whatever pertains to the perfection of human nature and the completeness of human life is found in our Lord expressly or potentially. A recent writer asks this question : "Of all the men that have lived, can we name a single one in whom the spirit of all humanity has dwelt?"<sup>1</sup> And, replying to his own query, he proceeds, "Even of the Prophet of Nazareth it was possible for so devout a man as Carlyle to say, with regret, 'There is no Falstaff in Him.'" Can we name a single one in whom the spirit of all humanity has dwelt? Yes. "The Son of Man." And one of the most convincing proofs of

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Orage.

His universality, that He was the "synthetic man," the gatherer and revealer of all the powers of humanity, is found in the fact that His hostile critics produce no charge against Him except that they find "no Falstaff in Him" ! As though He, who was for our advantage nailed to the bitter cross, was to amuse us also ! A comic mask has stamped its mimic features on the lava of Herculeum ; but there is something positively wanton in expecting the elements of humour in Him who came on the serious business whose symbol is the Cross. How perfect must He be in whom His adversaries can find no other fault than this !

But the objection is exceedingly popular that the faith of Christ does not work out in the perfection of the whole man. Our religion is charged with neglecting certain sides of human nature, various spheres of human activity. It has little to say about health, pleasure, art, science, literature, government, industry, and other subjects of similar import. Its tendency is toward the morbid—to asceticism in eating and drinking, to a deadness to the beauties of nature and the aspirations of art, to an acquiescence in a low level of mental and bodily existence. The Greek had a larger programme than the Hebrew, and we are represented as losing much by adopting the narrower creed.

What is the precise truth on this matter ? It is here. The Greek entertained a lofty idea of human nature, and passionately sought physical,

intellectual, and æsthetic perfection; yet all competent scholars agree that he failed to emphasize conscience. This was the marked omission of his splendid creed. He had everything except the main thing. On the other hand, whilst the New Testament says little about corporeal, mental, or artistic perfection, it is copious and imperative on the question of conscience. It omits everything except the main thing. And was not our Lord right? Do we not, first of all, need to be saved from the blighting power of moral lawlessness? Is not the essential malady of the race here? Is not salvation from selfishness, irregular desire, ignoble passion, false aims, the primary need of the race? Just as a physician has little to say to his patients about beauty or music, politics or trade, but concentrates himself on the disease and peril of the sufferer; so the great Physician of the race concentrates Himself on the healing and health of the spirit. The world at its best is little to the sick; and all is nothing to a diseased and tortured soul. Let us, however, not forget that though our Master did omit various items of the worldly programme, He did not forbid nor depreciate them. Nothing can be farther from the truth than to suggest that He did so. He simply taught that through the power of character we possess all things. Through personal godliness and spiritual righteousness we attain and retain all the glories of intellectual life, all the riches of material life, all the delights of social life. Our

Gospel brings us the heavenly wisdom, the inward peace, the power of pure living, the mighty hope, which enable us to possess our possessions, and to enjoy them forever.

So far as the fullness of bodily existence, appreciation of art, science, and knowledge, intellectual and political freedom, and a pure joy in all the pleasures of sense are concerned, our creed is as broad as that of rationalism. We draw the line at egotism and license ; but this is not to narrow life, only to secure it in its wholeness and fullness. We fear God, because thus we realize ourselves, who are made in His image ; we keep the moral law, because it is the charter of liberty, health, and peace ; we practice self-denial because it is the secret of self-development. "A full-grown man." In palm-houses noble trees are sometimes disfigured because their glassy palace is insufficiently lofty ; in the Zoölogical Gardens eagles are cramped in narrow cages : but our religion allows space and freedom for the fullness of our faculty. The monastery thrusts human nature into a narrow mould, denying it the glory and joy of free expansion : but the Church of God is not a monastery ; it is as wide as the horizon, spacious as the ampler air, securing liberty and supplying stimulation to every faculty and aspiration of our manifold nature.

Let us, then, as Christian believers, go on to realize our faith in all its lengths and breadths. From mistaken considerations Christians have

often been narrower than their creed ; although this no more qualifies the catholicity of Jesus Christ than bad actors discredit Shakespeare or poor players shame Mozart. Let us, however, give no justification to the enemy. "If we would be perfect, we must add to the Hebrew interest in righteousness the Greek interest in the true and beautiful, as well as the Teutonic enthusiasm for action and practical achievement." Well, add them ; there is no reason that we should not, there is every reason that we should. Having the kingdom of God and His righteousness, let us cultivate every talent of our nature, and take possession of the "all other things" pertaining to our rich inheritance.

3. The *harmoniousness* of the Christian ideal. "Full-grown man, unto the measure of the fullness of Christ." Nearly all the gifted writers who attempt a Life of Christ remark on the extreme difficulty of representing their subject because of the faultlessness and harmoniousness of His character ; it being so much easier to depict the partial and irregular than to describe the smoothness of absolute perfection. All graces blended in the Master in exquisite proportion ; and whilst all feel the charm of His unearthly beauty, none may paint it. And, in truth, Christianity cannot be said to inculcate any special virtue, or to possess any distinguishing grace. The New Testament expression of holiness contains nothing defective or exaggerated ; all fine features of

character and action in just proportion compose its ideal.

For where such various virtues we recite  
'Tis like the Milky Way, all over-bright,  
But sown so thick with stars 'tis undistinguished light.

Completeness, plenitude, justness, constitute Christlikeness. It was an artistic law in Greece that no victor in the games could have a portrait statue of himself set up unless he had been successful in all the five forms of contest, since anything short of success in all the five would leave open the possibility of certain parts of his body having been developed at the expense of others, owing to which it could not at the first glance present, as a perfect figure ought to present, that perfection of adaptability in all its parts to work harmoniously towards one end. As the Greek was thus anxious to secure the full and symmetrical development of the body, the faith of Christ, as set forth by St. Paul, is set upon the realization of our whole personality, in its utmost fullness and most delicate harmoniousness. If perfection is the harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature, who can study the New Testament without feeling that it contemplates the sanctification of all our powers; that Christianity is the study of perfection, and the secret of it?

It is possible to sacrifice the body to the intellect, the intellect to the body, or the conscience



to both ; but our faith involves no such sacrifice, irregularity, or disproportion. The body is held in reverence, a sacredness is henceforth attached to it beyond anything antiquity surmised, and the habits which secure its health, strength, and beauty are rigidly insisted upon. Reason, knowledge, wisdom, in their largest sweep and highest flight, here receive sanction and inspiration. The whole range of the virtues is comprehended, and every jewel of righteousness, in its turn, is honoured, and the spirit, capable of God and destined for the eternal, is exalted as its kingliness demands, and gives the crowning glory to our manifold nature. Setting the Master ever before us, and remembering the greatness of our calling in Him, His loftiness, completeness, and beauty shall pass into our spirit and character. Nothing low, narrow, partial, or unlovely shall survive ; the essential glory of human nature shall be revealed in us, because Christ dwells richly in our heart.

## XII

### THE REPROACH OF THE GOSPEL

*Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards.—NUM. xvi. 14.*

**I**SRAEL came out of Egypt with a great promise. "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmaster; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, now declare that this promise has not been fulfilled: in so many words, they accuse Moses and Aaron of having deceived Israel. They insinuate that the tribes had been duped by plausible representations; instead of basking in luxurious landscapes, or possessing rich cities, the wilderness was becoming their grave, and the people were only too ready to believe that they had been cruelly deceived, unjustly and shamefully treated. Agitators of the type of Dathan and Abiram are quickly popular. The religious position to-day closely resembles that pictured in the text. We listen to a veritable chorus of complaints against

the Gospel and the Christian Church. Our faith, it is alleged, has done nothing for us; the miseries of modern society are boldly laid at our doors. "Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey"; and in a fit of false humility the Church gives far too much heed to these murmurings, and paralyzes herself by self-depreciation. Let us, then, in the spirit of candour, seek the exact truth of this matter. Can our religion justly be considered a failure? Can the Church fairly be held responsible for the ills of society? We believe the reproach of the Gospel is unjust, and that we have no reason to be ashamed of our Master; we maintain that, whilst the Church must acknowledge her sins and failures, no reason exists to justify her loss of self-respect.

I. WE TAKE THE WIDER RANGE AND CONSIDER THE PROMISE OF GOD TO THE RACE AT LARGE. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people, and I am come down to deliver them, and to bring them into a good land." This promise heaven has given to mankind—the promise of a terrestrial perfection and inheritance far beyond the existing order. The universal instinct anticipates a magnificent future for humanity on the earth. This hope has kindled the poet's loftiest songs; it has proved the sovereign solace of the seer; and in it the moralist has found his strongest argument and best inspiration. The world in its youth saw visions, and, growing old, dreams dreams not less splendid. Tragic experience does

not destroy sentiment ; reasoned pessimism does not strangle instinctive optimism ; ages of conflict and suffering fail to quench the prophetic poetry of the human heart. All nations, ages, and faiths share in the great hope for which so little can be said on any experimental ground. And what is this magnificent hope, so universal and persistent, but the handwriting of God in the spirit of the race ! Moreover, this instinct of expectation is fully authenticated by revelation. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people, and I am come down to deliver them." Here is the sum of revelation ; the whole of the sacred book is the self-same promise writ large. To this all the prophets and apostles witness. We hold the solemn and indubitable declaration of the Father of all flesh that His purpose is to bring the nations out of this present disordered and unhappy condition into a new earth full of all glorious things.

Yet all are agreed that this hope has not hitherto been fulfilled. We cannot mistake the world as we know it for the one promised to our fathers. And this fact many impatiently and bitterly bemoan. "Thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards." The new earth does not appear. The golden age has not dawned. The abundance of peace seems as far off as ever. How is this ?

Scepticism gives a stark denial to the great expectation. The millennium is nothing more than

a mocking mirage of the strange wilderness in which we wander ; poets, prophets, and preachers may be deceived by it, but the austere rationalist knows it for what it is—an unsubstantial image painted on the desert vapour. The crimes and miseries of men arise out of the very constitution of things, and only visionaries anticipate an ideal world. We reply to this scepticism, “It would be unphilosophical to mistrust a deep and persistent instinct.” Dr. Duncan said of the Gospel, “It is too grand to be false” ; and we may say the same of the steady and brilliant hope which is the solace and inspiration of mankind. Pessimism is always reasoned, and therefore partakes of the suspicion attaching to all reasoning ; optimism is instinctive, and carries with it the authority of the truthfulness of nature. “Truth is at the bottom of a well” ; certainly, if anywhere, at the bottom of that deepest of all wells—the human heart. The poetry of prophecy is logic set on fire. Our vast hope is our grandest asset, and one that the rationalist ought not to ignore. We refuse to believe that the sinfulness and wretchedness of mankind are organic and eternal ; we believe rather in that audacious and persistent instinct which heralds a nobler and happier world, and which continues to justify itself by sustaining and advancing the actual world.

Secularism has its own answer. The bright side of the secularism and socialism of which we hear so much is its hopefulness. The contemporary

literature of secularism glows with the imagery of Isaiah and St. John; it gives fresh expression to the inextinguishable hopefulness of the human heart. But it goes wrong in attempting to explain the reasons which delay the golden day. In its philosophy the solution of the problem of progress is purely intellectual. Our sociological theories are false; our political programmes are misconceived; our statesmen are unskillful; the currency is based on false principles; our commercial system needs revision; we have failed to cultivate science, and the right kind of science. We are kept in the wilderness by intellectual ignorance. It is impossible to accept this explanation. No geographical, topographical, or economic misconception barred Canaan to the Israelites; and no intellectual blunder keeps the race out of its promised rest. We must get rid of the notion that the fundamental problem of society is intellectual. No political Moses will deliver us out of Egypt; no philosophical Aaron guide us through the desert; no scientific Joshua lead us over Jordan.

When God gave Israel the great promise, it was accompanied by a condition. "Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies, and His statutes, which He hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land



which the Lord swore unto thy fathers." Their carcases fell in the wilderness because they failed to keep the moral condition of their charter. The fixing of their soul on false gods, sloth, pride, sensuality, selfishness, kept the chosen people out of Canaan; and the fault is chiefly moral that defrauds the race of that grander inheritance which flickers alluringly before its eyes. Forgetfulness of God, and the unrighteousness that arises out of that forgetfulness, explains the prolongation of our exile, the postponement of our hope. "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." We are all persuaded that the world is capable of a far higher glory and felicity than it has attained. Science is continually indicating the suppressed magnificence of the physical universe; a bird of paradise is hidden in every crow, a rose in every weed. Society is yet fuller of glorious possibilities. It is admitted on all hands that our civilization is veritable barbarism compared with what might so easily be. For what, then, are we waiting? "For the manifestation of the sons of God"; that is, for a godly, righteous, brotherly race. Isaiah gives the key to the millennial earth he so graphically describes: "Thy people also shall be all righteous." Oh, that all men would be good for one day; speaking the truth, keeping clean hands, walking up-rightly, delighting in mercy, doing justly, loving and fearing God, and keeping His command-

ments ! In that day we should cross Jordan, the problems of ages would solve themselves, and the music of humanity make gross the music of the spheres. Simple goodness primarily, not splendid philosophy nor clever statesmanship, will suffice. "Thy sun shall no more go down ; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself : for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

II. WE NARROW THE VIEW AND CONSIDER THE PROMISE OF GOD IN CHRIST IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTENDOM. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and I am come down to deliver them, and to bring them into a good land and a large." The Incarnation brought out the full significance of the message which called Israel out of Egypt. Jesus Christ came as the Redeemer of the race. He was manifested, a greater than Moses, to lead it out of the rotting civilizations of the pagan world into a glorious heritage of righteousness and peace. What the noblest heathen had seen only in vision, what the Israelite had received only in symbol, that the incarnate One was to secure in glorious reality of truth, holiness, and blessedness for all the nations. The advent of the Saviour was replete with splendid promise.

"Yes," retorts the murmurer, "of splendid promise, and little more!" They insult the Redeemer, they reproach the Gospel. "Thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk

and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards." Are the rookeries of our great cities an inheritance of fields and vineyards? Is the crust of the relieving-officer the promised milk and honey? Is "the bitter cry" the echo of the angel's song? Is the poverty, degradation, and misery we see all around us the ideal State? So far from being better off than the heathen, it is daringly declared that we are in a condition much more deplorable. Dathan and Abiram look back to Egypt and reproach Moses: "Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness?" They discovered that Canaan was really behind them, and that their sojourn in Egypt had been a pleasant picnic, only it had been improperly understood and foolishly disturbed. So to-day Jesus Christ is reproached, His Gospel and His Church. We were better off without them. "A weapon of progress in former times, Christianity has now become an instrument of destruction. It is the grave in which mankind buries what little conscience and light it still possesses."<sup>1</sup> And Christianity is freely represented in infidel literature as an unavailing and exasperating system largely responsible for the diseases and discontents of our age. The flowery barbarism that the faith of Christ displaced has been succeeded by a condition of things far worse than any recorded in ancient history.

<sup>1</sup> George Sand.

1. Is the Gospel, then, a failure? In its defense, let us at once say that it is no failure, either in the case of the individual or the nation who puts it to the proof. The ruling races are exactly those who have most cordially received and honoured it. Whatever may be the defects of Christian civilization, it is better than any that preceded it; unspeakably better than that of Greece, based on slavery, or of Rome, founded in brute power. Compared with the New Jerusalem of Isaiah, or the Holy City of St. John, much is left to be desired; but contrasted with Athens, Rome, or Carthage, the Christian State gives sufficient cause for gratitude and congratulation. We must not shut our eyes to the fact that the civilization of Christendom is the best yet, infinitely the best. The old proverb counsels, "Never let fools see half-finished work." Shown a half-finished statue by Phidias, such critics pronounce it spoilt marble; shown a half-finished picture by Rubens, they adjudge it a daub; shown a half-finished palace by Michael Angelo, they express contempt, and prefer a hovel. Critics of this genius scoff at the splendid incompleteness they are incapable of understanding. What is Christendom but the half-finished work of Jesus Christ? Here we behold His pure thought, His lofty ideals, His saving grace, struggling with hostile elements; at a thousand points partially embodied, and yet painfully incomplete. We stand in the very midst of the mighty struggle for the incorporation of the Christian spirit and holi-

ness, resisted on every side by ignorance, unbelief, and animalism. An unsympathetic eye can see only fragmentariness, disorder, disharmony ; but the sincere discern even in the crudities, blemishes, and apparently ineffectual strivings of Christian society the signs of the dawning of a great perfection. Did we say "the half-finished" work of Jesus Christ? The Christendom of to-day is the faintest beginning, the roughest outline, the merest hint of the grandeur of Christ's thought and purpose. And He shall complete what He has begun. The great Artist is not dead, leaving a torso ; He lives, He is the greatest power in the world, working mightily in our midst ; and He shall never rest until He has lifted the whole fabric of our mixed and perplexing civilization into the full glory of His thought, love, and righteousness.

And the faith of Christ equally justifies itself in the experience of the individual. Christian people do not tenant the rookeries ; they do not furnish the hungry, homeless, hopeless classes ; they do not raise the bitter cry. The faith of Christ, sincerely tried, loyally obeyed, means bright faces, bright homes, bright children, bright everything, as is demonstrated on every side. And these humble, devout disciples vitalize all society, they are the bond of social order and the soul of the world's progress. Christianity fails in one place, in one place only ; and that is where it is never tried. Our leader can fulfill His gracious promise. So far as we have followed Him, He has made us

forget that this is a wilderness at all; He has filled our borders with the finest of wheat, sown the sand with smiling flowers, suffused our sky with pleasant light, unsealed living springs of refreshment, and made the common air sweet with the breath of heaven. This is the testimony of millions.

2. If, then, the Gospel is not a failure, is the Christian Church in fault? It has come to be quite the fashion to impute whatever is unsatisfactory in the community to its infidelity and neglect. That the world should find the Church a convenient scapegoat is what might reasonably be expected; but the surprising thing is that the Church has become her own bitter censor, lashing herself unmercifully for the existence of dark spots in the community. She takes herself to task for the abject foolishness of her methods, for her lack of sympathy, for her slothfulness, selfishness, pride, and worldliness, and concludes that the maladies and miseries of society would have been prevented, or long ago removed, had she only been wise and faithful. There is another side to the Christian Church than this, and one that it is high time to emphasize. She has reason, indeed, for humility before God, but no reason to blush for herself before the world. No other institution can compare with her for a moment in purity, charity, zeal, and sacrifice. Outside the walls of Rome is a vast mound consisting of the coarse broken pottery of antiquity; as a matter of con-



venience, the ancient Roman threw up this colossal heap of the rejected and shattered utensils of the household and of commerce. Are we to judge of ancient art by this rubbish heap? Surely not. We judge it rather by the rich and beautiful vases, wonderful in amplitude, grace, and colour, which are the priceless jewels of our museums and palaces. And we do not judge the Church by the fractious clay which resists her ministry of truth and love, but by her delightful creations wherever the great Potter has had free course with passive clay. The Church of God on earth is crowded with vessels of honour fit for the Master's use. And the palace of our glorious King glows with a vast multitude which no man can number of transfigured shapes redeemed from the dust. We judge the Church by the millions of noble souls who, yielding to her redeeming and hallowing influence, have been counted worthy of the high places of the perfect universe.

Whatever were the frailties of our spiritual fathers, through the generations they present a spectacle of devotion and heroism, enthusiasm, and sacrifice unparalleled elsewhere. Against the mightiest odds they so coöperated with divine grace as to establish the kingdom of God far and wide as we see it to-day. The Church indulges in the habit of self-scorn that she may stir up herself to greater endeavour and faithfulness; but an excess of scourging is more likely to discourage and paralyze. If the Church is all she is repre-

sented to be of imperfection and failure, we may well begin to think that there is an organic cause for the melancholy result that we are not likely to remove. Amiel says truly, "By despising himself too much a man comes to be worthy of his own contempt." Which is true of a corporation as well as of an individual. We have, alas! no room to flatter ourselves, to sit as a queen without sorrow; we have abundant reason to be ashamed of our selfishness and sloth; yet in the name of their God His people have done valiantly in seeking the salvation and welfare of the race, and it will best comfort and inspire them to glorify the grace that has made them always to triumph.

When Christianity is blamed for these failures of civilization, it is forgotten that it deals with free agents, that its action is moral not mechanical, and that the efforts of the Church are qualified by that incalculable quantity—the human will. It is often argued as though a degraded district might be reclaimed as engineers drain a bog—so many workers, so much money, machinery, and time, and the task is exactly accomplished. The case is profoundly different. The soul possesses a strange power of refusing, withstanding, trampling upon the most gracious offers and opportunities. The Old Testament fully recognizes this. "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Our Master fixes the blame here. "O Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her ! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." And the Acts of the Apostles repeatedly testify to the refusing power of men. "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, He shook out His raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean : from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

The sad things of character and circumstance we deplore to-day are to be explained to a very large extent indeed by contempt of God's Holy Word, by hardness of heart, by willful closing of the eyes upon the light, by deliberately quenching the Spirit of grace. There are few amongst us to whom this word of salvation has not come in some manner, at some time, and yet many make the grace of God of none effect by a fatal choice. When Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his task was light and pleasant. He led the sheep to the pasture and they ate, to the brook and they drank, to the fold and they rested ; but, becoming the shepherd of Israel, he sighed under a far more difficult task. He might bring the people into green pastures, invite them to living waters, open

to them a sheltering fold ; it remained, however, with them whether to eat, drink, rest, or not. They were men, not sheep ; and their wandering in desert and mountain was determined by their own bitter will. So the great Shepherd of the sheep is able, willing, yea, yearning to bless ; but He is neglected, resisted, scorned, and now, as in the days of His flesh, cannot do many mighty works because of unbelief. We refuse to believe that the dark spots of our civilization are to be explained by the inefficacy of the Gospel or by the faithlessness of the Church ; primarily and chiefly, they are the result of the awful power that we possess to deny the solicitations from above and choose descending pathways. As Ruskin eloquently laments, " There is no subject of thought more melancholy, more wonderful, than the way in which God permits so often His best gifts to be trodden under foot of men, His richest treasures to be wasted by the moth, and the mightiest influences of His Spirit . . . to be quenched and shortened by miseries of chance and guilt. I do not wonder at what men suffer, but I wonder often at what they lose."

Let the outside world for once listen to our Master, follow His leading, obey His words, breathe His spirit, and instead of reproaching its Redeemer for its diseases and discontents, it shall exult, as did Israel in the ancient days, and as the sacramental host does to-day. " And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give

unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." "For Jerusalem shall be built with sapphires, and emeralds, and precious stones: thy walls, and towers, and battlements with pure gold. And the streets of Jerusalem shall be paved with beryl, and carbuncle, and stones of Ophir. And all her streets shall say, Alleluia; and they shall praise Him, saying, Blessed be God, which hath extolled it *forever*."

## XIII

### THE ABSOLUTE GOOD

*The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow therewith.*—PROV. x. 22.

THE ancients believed that the pyramids were so constructed that they cast no shadow ; but few things in this world are wholly free from shadows. Well-nigh all circumstances and events, however propitious some may be, entail disadvantages. Absolute perfection is rare in any direction. Yet it is now our privilege to offer unqualified advantage, a gift without a drawback, a blessing that is an unalloyed joy. In its most definite sense, the blessing of the Lord is the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ ; and we hope to show that a truly Christian life can bring men good, only good ; that it implies no abatements whatever, but is a rich and an unadulterated blessing.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF TRUE RELIGION UPON CHARACTER affords a proof of this. Here eminently “the blessing of the Lord maketh rich.” It is sometimes said that Christianity brings a message of salvation, rather than that it furnishes a code of morals. In a sense this is true. Think,



however, what salvation by Christ means. Salvation from what? From that malign principle and power by which character is deformed and destroyed; salvation from pride, wrath, selfishness, ambition, impurity, and all the passions which unrighteousness implies. Salvation into what? Into the divine principle and power by which character is exalted and transfigured; salvation into the love of truth, justice, humility, purity, and charity. Our position is this—that in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ human character attains its last and brightest expression. On the banks of the Humber we have seen a vine growing in the open air. In the summer it put forth leaves, the fruit began to fashion, and one might have supposed that it was going to ripen into purple clusters; but it never came to perfection: the grapes remained paltry and green, withering on the tree. A vine planted in the open air in the north of England is always a pathetic spectacle. How different with the vine as it is seen growing in Italy! Its branches are flung abroad as though in conscious triumph, every leaf upon it is a poem, and the clusters gleam like purple constellations set in a firmament like unto an emerald. Here is the rapture of the poet, the dream of the artist, the joy of the vintner. Yet wide as is the distinction between the vine of the Humber and the vineyards of Italy, the difference is yet infinitely greater between character as it struggles in the chill air of secularism and as it ripens in the sunshine of Jesus

Christ. "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman. I am the Vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." The true Vine is incomparable in the wealth and beauty of moral fruition; and the branches, sharing in His fatness, bear the richest fruits of holiness that ever ripened beneath the sun.

It is retorted, There are as good people outside the Church as are found in it! We readily concede that many most excellent people are outside religious communions. But this does not in the least invalidate the claim of the Church to be the prime inspirer of righteousness. Suppose one were to argue, "In the woodlands and forests are trees as beautiful as any found in our parks, in the meadows are flowers as delightful as any in our conservatories, the landscape outside has its glories which may successfully challenge the pride of the garden." Now no instructed person supposes for a moment that the fine things of the landscape sprang naturally where they are found. Few, if any, of these trees and blooms are indigenous to our island. Even the red clover of our fields was once a rare plant in a conservatory. The glories of the wood and meadow have escaped from the walled garden, and they would never have adorned the landscape had they not first been introduced and cherished by the gardener. So the goodness outside the Church of Christ is immensely indebted to the teaching, inspiration, and discipline of the

Christian faith and fellowship through many generations ; and such goodness would never have been discovered outside the Church had it not first been in it. Fine moral qualities and characteristics that to-day disown all ecclesiastical associations are nevertheless native to the soil of godliness ; and if they are not to degenerate, they must be replanted in that soil. The main inspiration of righteousness, whether included within the pale of the Church or found beyond it, is drawn from the spiritual doctrine of the New Testament ; and character in its last perfection of strength, fullness, harmoniousness, and delicacy is realized in the closer fellowship of Him who is Himself the perfection of beauty. To adopt Dante's expression,

Every good which out of it is found  
Is nothing but a ray of its own light.

"And He addeth no sorrow therewith." We are bold to maintain that the gain in character in Christ is attended by no drawback. It implies no sacrifice of strength ; the active elements of mind and will are in nowise sapped by the passive. Our Master is foremost in the line of heroes, and He inspires His followers with His own strength and courage. The Christian character implies no sacrifice of tenderness. The passive qualities essential to the completeness of human nature are not invalidated by the active ; multitudes follow in Christ's train who combine the tenacity of steel with the softness of silk. No sacrifice of self-

respect is exacted. Whilst the Christian faith abases us for our sins, it assumes our greatness and respects our greatness at every step. No sacrifice of rationality is involved in Christian discipleship. No error is greater than to suppose that our faith puts any arbitrary limit to reason; the New Testament enlarges the human spirit without imposing upon it any narrowing or humiliating limitations. Nor are we called to make any sacrifice of practicability. Our aspirations are not mocked nor our strength wasted in the pursuit of unattainable standards. No sacrifice of individuality is implied. True piety destroys none of the charm of personality; on the contrary, it elicits, most fully, the special glory of the individual soul. And, finally, the moral ideal and discipline of the faith of Christ does not prejudice the humanness of its disciples. Whilst disclosing a higher world, it does not forget that we are citizens of this, and members one of another. Looking to Jesus, and simply following Him, the integrity of our spirit can suffer in no respect or degree. In His own character is nothing defective or unbalanced; nor is there in the believer who is complete in Him.

A distinguished writer volunteers this statement: "I have lately been brought into touch with a new insect—an infinitesimal live thing—which is only to be found where there are orchids. The pain and irritation, the redness and swelling, which come from these particular pests are neither more

nor less than horrible." So the new and gorgeous flowers, in which we find so much pride, bring with them a ghastly parasite to discount our joy. It is a parable of the whole natural life. Rarely do we acquire a treasure, but concealed somewhere within its folds is a secret sorrow. Our Christian faith is the glorious exception to this painful law of the worldly life. What an ethical paradise is the New Testament! Moving from page to page, we are charmed by a host of lovely virtues and graces of character—patience, meekness, self-control, temperance, pureness, truth, gentleness, sympathy, love, and bewildering clusters of gracious qualities and perfections. We are wandering in a divine garden, where every path is embroidered with lilies, festooned with roses, and there is not a solitary parasite in the whole garden of God. "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow therewith."

II. THE INFLUENCE OF TRUE RELIGION ON SOCIETY AND ITS MATERIAL CONDITIONS is equally benign. "The blessing of the Lord" makes rich the community and its whole practical life. For generations the faith of Christ has purified public life; not a generation passes without some blighting thing passing with it. But must these reformations and regenerations be credited to the action of the Christian faith? It is alleged that a law of health is established in the very constitution of things, and that it is by virtue of this law that social evils are outgrown and

eliminated. We are not thus persuaded ; we cannot believe that these profound moral diseases are extirpated by natural causes. Apart from the ideals and forces of Christianity, how long would it have taken for infanticide to have grown out of China ? how long for cannibalism to have grown out of the South Seas ? how long for Sutteeism to have grown out of India ? how long before the pariah would have challenged the Brahmin with the protest, "I also am a man" ? The fact remains that these cancers never do grow out ; they stubbornly persist and miserably consume the organism upon which they have fastened, except when arrested by sovereign antidotes from the outside. It is a fact of history that these and similar maladies cease only when they encounter the healing power of the Christian faith and life. The law of evolution may effect much in the realm of character when stimulated and sustained by the truth and grace of the Gospel ; it will do nothing for the extirpation of consuming moral maladies where that truth and grace are absent.

Let us once again remind ourselves that through the knowledge of Christ we attain and retain the best things of our civilization. Alas, many amongst us are guilty of strange blindness and ingratitude ! They are eager to deny our debt to the faith of our devout ancestors, and ready to trace our blessings to any source but the actual one. One of Shakespeare's characters speaks thus :



Bid her steal into the pleached bower,  
Where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun,  
Forbid the sun to enter, like favourites,  
Made proud by princes, that advance their pride  
Against that power that bred it.

So to-day Englishmen dowered with manifold intellectual, material, social, and political blessing—blessing which surely springs from the power of godliness in the national life and history—are in haste to deny and despise the heavenly source of their blessing. Our pure domesticity, noble literature, opulent commerce, equal laws, age-long security, sovereign rule, and a vast body of public happiness, are honeysuckles ripened by the sun, which now forbid the sun to enter. Let *us*, however, not forget the orb that has fostered and ripened our rich inheritance. “The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, yea, we have a goodly heritage”; and we will remember the sun that has created our summer, and glorify Him who has caused that sun to shine so brightly upon us. “Blessed be Thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our Father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou rulest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now

therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name."

"And He addeth no sorrow therewith." We maintain that the faith of Christ works only good alike to the individual and the community. A distinguished writer criticizes thus the contention that religion has been an unmixed blessing to the race: "We may well think it unphilosophical and unconvincing to enumerate all the blessings which religion has bestowed, without compiling a list of the evils which it has inflicted; to tell us how the Christian doctrine enlarged the human spirit, without observing what narrowing limitations it imposed; to dwell on all the mitigating influences with which the Christian Churches have been associated, while forgetting all the ferocities which they have inspired. The history of European belief offers a double record since the decay of polytheism; and if for a certain number of centuries this record shows the civilization of men's instincts by Christianity, it reveals to us in the centuries subsequent the reverse process of the civilization of Christianity by men's instincts."<sup>1</sup> We deny that Christianity has "a double record." We are not reduced to the sorry position of keeping the history of our faith by double entry, recording so much to its credit, so much to its debit, and then, after totalling the respective columns, to come to a conclusion as to whether, on the whole, it was worth having; religion is not a matter into which

<sup>1</sup> John Morley, *Essay on Turgot*.

fine calculations of less or more enter ; it has, indeed, no place whatever for arithmetic.

We repeat, we flatly deny that Christianity has "a double record." Ecclesiasticism has ; *it* has wrought both good and evil, as indeed the best things and institutions ever do when human infirmity enters into them ; but the pure truth of the New Testament has in all ages been an unmixed blessing. To charge upon the doctrine of Christ and of His apostles the errors of the Church is as unphilosophical and unconvincing as it would be to charge upon commerce the follies of guilds, upon knowledge the prejudices of universities, or upon liberty the ineptitudes of parliaments. Christianity itself has no more "a double record" than the sun has. Following the kind of reasoning in the quotation just given, how easy it would be to compile a list of the evils inflicted upon us by the sun ! We are told that sunlight promotes malarial fever, that too much sunshine makes the desert, and it is notorious that many suffer from sunstroke. But we know that light can do no wrong, and that the real causes of these terrestrial evils must be sought much nearer home than the sun. The sun has one record only—the sweetness of the morning, the splendour of the noon, the glory of the grass and flower, the harvest gold, the vintage purple, the lustre and loveliness of the world. So the gospel of love, righteousness, and peace has only one record ; it is a blessing to whatever soul may seek to live it, to every com-

munity that loves and obeys it, and the desert place that welcomes it smiles back in the blossom of the rose. The discipleship of Christ does us good, and not evil, all the days of our life.

III. THE PRECIOUS INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ON HUMAN EXPERIENCE is the last instance we will adduce of the truth of our text. Here "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich." The New Testament has little to say about the world we figure on the map, or the worlds around us with which astronomy is concerned; but it concerns itself largely with the world within us—the sphere of the spirit, the realm of thought, imagination, and feeling. As the ages progress this inner world, the world of self-consciousness, is ever seen more clearly to be the most important world with which we have to do. To enrich this world Christ came. "He who was rich for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." He did not come to make us rich in gold, worldly power and fame; He brought us treasures of heavenly wisdom, the pure gold of goodness, power to overcome the world, purity whiter than any fuller on earth can whiten, peace which this world can neither give nor take away, consolation and strength in sorrow, the hope and courage which are inextinguishable. How rich was Christ Himself in the treasures of the soul! How rich were the first disciples in all spiritual wealth! How rich true Christians are yet in that

interior peace, assurance, and joy, the price of which is beyond rubies !

Sceptics are fond of dwelling upon the infinite melancholy of the Christian faith. They avow that rarely is religion a consolation, but usually a perpetual source of inward unrest and alarm. The pains of the spirit endured by believers are terrible to contemplate ; only darkness, despondency, and despair. But with what authority do these critics speak ? If we would be justly informed on such a question, we must appeal to men who know something about it. Look into the Epistles for the reflection of the experience of the primitive saints. So far as the contentment, victoriousness, and rapture of their spirit are concerned, they might have stepped on paths of velvet, feasted more delicately than nobles, been smothered with roses, and yet all the while they were in suffering and humiliation, a spectacle to men and angels. The power, triumph, and felicity of these primitive Christians are wonderful and indisputable. The *Te Deum* expresses no gloom in the experience of a later age. The old Methodists were conscious of a tranquillity, brightness, and an ecstasy which irradiated their darkest days, and found glowing expression in their favourite songs.

The winter's night and summer's day  
Glide imperceptibly away,  
Too short to sing Thy praise.  
Too few we find the happy hours,  
And haste to join those heavenly powers,  
In everlasting lays.

Nietzsche predicts that "the religion of the future will be the religion of golden laughter." The religion of the future, then, will be the religion of Jesus Christ. No better definition could be given of it. Laughter devoid of sorrow. That does not bespeak the vacant but the noble mind. That is without stain or folly. That is not like the crackling of thorns under a pot, but steady as a star. The laughter that comes last. Such are the peace and cheerfulness of the pure in heart.

"And He addeth no sorrow therewith." The faith of Christ has often been reprobated because it has much concern with matters of pain and sadness. It is alleged that the doctrines of religion have caused incalculable misery by dwelling on such themes as sin, death, and retribution; yet is this no argument against the wholesomeness and joyousness of the faith. It has much to do with the morbid side of human nature and the sad aspects of human life, but it does not create these aspects; it seeks wholly to soothe and heal. What an impeachment could be trumped up against the Royal College of Surgeons! What gloomy books they publish! What cruel instruments they handle! What bitter medicines they mix! What ghastly operations they perform! If we could once abolish doctors, it would seem as though we should restore the gaiety of nations; but we know how absurd all this is. The office of the physician is to heal, and the painful incidents of his ministry are necessary accidents which cast



no shadow on the profession. Thus religion has to do with dark things—to trouble the mind, alarm the conscience, pierce the heart ; yet it does not create the dark things, its ministry is one altogether of mercy, recovery, and blessing.

Let me, then, commend to you the laughter in which is no heaviness. Buy the gold that has no alloy. Feed on the honey that has no sting. Drink the wine that has no dregs. Press to your bosom the Rose of Sharon that has no thorn.

## XIV

### THE SPADE-WORK OF THE KINGDOM

*And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand that were hewers in the mountains.*  
—1 KINGS V. 15.

LIKE as to its structure, furniture, and services, the temple of Solomon had a spiritual and an evangelical signification. Our Lord institutes analogies between Himself and the temple, and the apostles repeatedly refer to the sacred palace as typical of the Christian Church. The temple on Zion, with everything relating to it, was full of prophetic significance; and we do no violence to the text when we see in it an anticipation of a large class of evangelical workers and of a considerable branch of evangelical work. Tens of thousands to-day "bear burdens," are "hewers in the mountains"—are servants of Christ, working in wild, difficult, and distant places; bending themselves to obscure tasks and the very drudgery of things that the living temple of a regenerate humanity may be built. About these particular workers of the kingdom we propose now to speak; to recognize the vastness and seriousness of their service, the greatness and certainty of their reward.

I. THE INITIAL SERVICE IN THE SALVATION AND UPLIFTING OF MAN IS PECULIARLY THE VOCATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. The initial work of the temple-building was wrought by these "burden-bearers" and "hewers in the mountains"; they came before the masons, carpenters, and clever artificers; in fact, the building of the glorious shrine was impossible without the toil of these humble workers. And here we see foreshadowed a great truth for ourselves. If ever the wild forests of heathendom are to be builded into noble nationalities, and the rough blocks of humanity at home and abroad lifted out of the dirt and polished after the similitude of a palace, it will be because religious faith and passion animate an army of "burden-bearers" and "hewers in the mountains" to begin at the beginning and deal with men in their lowest estate. Note these two things:

I. *The initial work of uplifting the race is spiritual.* Spiritual faith and work are the antecedents of all civilizations. They who affirm that religion grows out of civilization are contradicted by all history; if history teaches anything, it teaches that the sovereign civilizations sprang out of a spiritual root of some kind. The great nationalities of antiquity originated in, and were vitalized by, supernatural conceptions. Their mythologies might be "religion run wild"; but it was religious thought and feeling that presided over their birth and unfolding. It is clear that the modern civilizations

originated in a spiritual faith, even the faith of Christ. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Here, then, the apostle began—with the declaration of the love of God, the pardon of sin through the death of His Son, everlasting life through union with Him. It was a strange starting-point; no mere statesman or philosopher would have thought of thus beginning to create a new world, yet history has vindicated the apostle. Out of the Gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ, preached in Italy, Greece, and Spain, in the forests of Germany, on the moors of Britain, has arisen that higher and happier condition of things we so proudly share. Spiritual men ever have been, and are, the pioneers of civilization.

2. *The initial work of uplifting the race is by spiritual workers beginning at the basement.* Christ Himself was the first burden-bearer and hewer in the mountains. He began with the people, and with whatever was lowest among the people. He was not manifested at a great political centre like Rome, at a great intellectual centre like Athens, or at a great ecclesiastical centre like Jerusalem; but He appeared in the obscure village of a despised province. "Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the peo-

ple." He did not attempt the work of the orator, philosopher, or scholar; He began with Galilee, its peasants and pariahs. When the Master sent forth the twelve, "they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the Gospel and healing everywhere." They did not primarily concern themselves with the upper tiers, they were not commissioned as the carvers and goldsmiths of civilization; they appealed to the people. The apostles, after our Lord's resurrection, obeyed the same genius, following closely in His steps who "came to seek and to save that which was lost." And the obscure, hard, rough, forbidding, elementary, and unrequited work involved in raising savage nations, sunken masses, lapsed classes, the ignorant, disinherited, and forlorn of all kinds, has, through nearly two thousand years, been mainly the work of the Christian Church; and, had it not been done by it, would never have been done at all.

We have in our midst an organization known as "The Ethical Society." Its aim is to show that morality can be cultivated without religious sanctions and inspirations; and it addresses itself chiefly to cultured people through literary, scientific, and philosophical lectures. But this Society does nothing at the basement. It does not appeal to the multitude, establish missions in working-class neighbourhoods, nor send out missionaries to the heathen. Its sphere is purely intellectual and exquisite; it does not contemplate the raw

material, and the rough toil necessary before that material is made susceptible of higher education. Strictly speaking, they begin after the rude and painful work has been done; they are carvers, gilders, sculptors, polishers; they manipulate the friezes, statues, and ornaments of the social structure; they ceil with cedar and dye with vermilion the upper chambers, they paint and golden the finials. They are not lumbermen or quarrymen; they let the jungle and the mountain severely alone. And in this they are discreet. They lack the serious qualifications indispensable for popular initial service. They have not our conception of the preciousness of the raw material. The cross of Christ throws a strange splendour on our humanity. It reveals the commonest paving-stone to be striped jasper, fit for the city of God. Our conception of the grandeur of the lowliest member of the race is simply unique. They lack our dynamite. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." They are destitute of our wonderful tools: the jewelled drill that pierces even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart; the hammer that breaks in pieces the rocky heart; the axe sharper than a two-edged sword; the electric cutters, the diamond teeth, the pneumatic tools and energy which we find in the spiritual doctrine of our Master. They have none of these profound and incisive instruments. They



are without our lifting power: the sense of the righteous God, the attraction of the Cross, the power of the world to come. Dainty instruments and gentle touches suffice for the ornamentation of prepared material, but they are unavailing with stubborn quarries and oaks of Bashan.

Let us, then, remind ourselves that the initial work of uplifting and blessing men and nations is peculiarly ours. Statesmen, scholars, moralists, artists, poets, follow in due order of sequence; but the individual, the class, the tribe at the bottom of the scale, are our special charge. We have the great truths which appeal to the conscience, affections, and will. We urge mighty motives of hope and fear peculiar to ourselves. If we neglect this work, it will go undone. If, however, we are faithful here, everything is done. The spiritual worker at the basement, directly uplifting the ignorant, the degraded, the barbarian, by imparting to them higher knowledge, creating in them a nobler conscience, touching their heart with a pure love, strengthening their will to righteousness, is lifting the whole social superstructure higher in the heaven. The new world will not be built from the top, not by social or intellectual aristocracies, but through the purification and ennoblement of the masses, the depth.

II. THE INITIAL WORK OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IMPLIES IMMENSE SACRIFICE. The burden-bearers and hewers in the mountains encountered great trials and made severe sacrifices that the

stone and timber necessary for Solomon's temple might be forthcoming ; and the living temple of a regenerate humanity is possible only as evangelical workers are prepared greatly to deny themselves. And tens of thousands of such workers are to-day making manifold sacrifices for the world's salvation.

The service recorded in the text involved exile. They must be willing to leave their home, and work on a distant field. Many workers for God make great sacrifices of home life; many hours that they would joyfully spend with their families they consecrate to church work for the good of the people. And what of the missionaries? "And Solomon sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home." But the willing servants of a greater than Solomon are ready to cross wide seas and suffer expatriation for years, for a lifetime. We estimate too lightly the reality and cost of this sacrifice.

It was hard and disagreeable work. There was little romance, poetry, or taste about it. The craftsmen who built the temple had much that was delightful in their task—fine forms, rich colours, burnished surfaces, precious gems ; it was a joy to work in such material ; yet to bear burdens and hew timber was a rough task, unlighted by a poetic spark. If this world is to be saved, what a vast amount of drudgery must be done ! Common-place, colourless, insipid, vulgar work of visiting,

collecting, organizing, teaching. Alike at home and abroad much evangelical action necessarily offends the philosophic mind, the critical taste, the romantic, the dignified, the fastidious. Let us rejoice that great companies of Christian people find blessedness in the drudgery of the Church for Christ's sake, for souls' sake. They uncomplainingly set their hand to humble, disagreeable, monotonous, insipid service—instructing the ignorant, caring for the young, comforting the sorrowful, helping the sick and unfortunate, the savage and slave.

It was unpopular work. Much about it was calculated to offend, and there would be none too many candidates for it. The apostles were unpopular as they sought to turn the world upside-down. Luther exasperated tranquil critics as he fiercely wielded axe and hammer. Wesley's enthusiasm was accounted vulgar. Huxley was angered by the demonstrative methods of General Booth. And various orders of evangelical workers are despised by the supercilious. Missionaries are unpopular in several quarters. They are denounced in the interests of æstheticism. The literary critic regards it as sacrilege that the poetic things of Paganism should suffer. The missionary must not blast the rock lest he injure a picturesque situation ; nor fell the tree, although a upas-tree, lest he frighten the gorgeous birds which build in its branches, or damage the rare orchid that clings to its trunk. Livingstone was

resisted because he let light on the slave trade; and his brethren to-day are traduced as they denounce the opium trade with China or the atrocities of the Congo. The missionary is not popular at the Foreign Office. Evangelical work of the initial order will often appear to lack in refinement, prudence, and dignity. Men of exquisite taste and feeling in Solomon's time would turn with impatience from the rough, noisy workmen of the quarry and jungle, to admire the cunning work in gold and the lily-work of the temple pillars; and many to-day who are enthusiasts in the higher education have little sympathy with the ruder methods and associations of the initial work which alone renders all the rest possible.

These workers were willing to be ignored. "And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand . . . and fourscore thousand." In this summary fashion are they lumped and dismissed! Solomon's name was writ large all over the structure; Hiram, king of Tyre, secures honourable mention; Adoniram, who was over the levy, gets his name in: we know absolutely nothing, however, of these burden-bearers and hewers; they are impersonal, arithmetical, unhistorical. According to Victor Cherbuliez, "The hardest thing for mankind is to become a cipher"; but we may boast that tens of thousands are content to be reduced to ciphers if only they may glorify God and serve the best interests of the race.

Let us not to-day forget the humble work which

makes possible the splendid things of nations and Churches. In the Valley of Chamounix stands a most interesting monument. It presents two fine figures, that of Saussure, the famous scientist, and Balmat, the guide, who were the first pair to reach the summit of Mount Blanc. Saussure was a far greater man intellectually than Balmat, yet the scientist would never have scaled the glorious height except for the assistance of the little peasant. So, with a fine instinct, the Swiss have immortalized the two in noble statuary; for together they gave mankind a new world of science and romance. But it is a rare thing that he who makes a grand thing possible gets on the monument; the great man requires it all for himself, and must be left alone in his glory. So our eye is usually full of the famous reformer, the eloquent pastor, the munificent benefactor; of the Solomons, Hiram, and Adoniram of our times; and we hardly give a thought to the host of silent, patient, unnamed, and unrecorded drudges who are down below delving at the foundations, or far away on the mountains groaning as they fell the stubborn forest.

Yet we dare to believe that, in the end, every true though obscure disciple will secure direct and personal recognition. To-day we are lost in a crowd, but revelation assures us that we are not to abide ciphers forever. "And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel; with Clement also,

and with other my fellow labourers, whose names are in the book of life." Names, not always numbers. The sublime things of philanthropy and evangelization were impossible without the burden-bearers and hewers, and these shall not always be forgotten. He who has given a cup of cold water in the Master's name shall be distinguished and approved. "Each shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour."

III. THE SPLENDID HOPEFULNESS OF THIS INITIAL WORK. Out of the rugged mountain and wild wood these strenuous workers brought the wondrous temple. Coarse, dull, forbidding as their toil might seem, it at last took shape as the palace of God. "Great stones, costly stones, hewed stones," formed the foundation of the house. "The doors were also of olive-tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubim, and palm-trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold." "And the cedar of the house within was carved with gourds and open flowers." The pillars were adorned with rows of pomegranates, and garlanded with lily-work. "And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim." The shrine was "exceedingly magnificent," but all grew out of the work of pick, spade, axe, and crowbar. It is a parable of what is now being done by an army of devoted workers in the Church of God. Our undistinguished brethren are occupied with raw material, they are subject to distressing conditions,



the result of their strain and sacrifice is often ambiguous and disappointing, yet is their work grander than they know; they build a living temple of moral splendour which no Nebuchadnezzar shall spoil, a New Jerusalem no Titus shall destroy.

Consider the precious contributions which are being made towards the perfecting of the race and the glory of the future by the messengers of Christ in India, China, and Japan. A brilliant writer, not so long ago, published a most pessimistic and despairing forecast of the future as it relates to the inferior races. "The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races," who will absorb our trade, circumscribe our industry, humiliate our greatness, spurn our faith, and trample on our art and literature.<sup>1</sup> Now, we cannot for a moment believe in such predictions. So far from these people being a menace to civilization, we see in them splendid possibilities which the missionaries shall realize. The world's ungotten wealth is chiefly in these mighty populations. Think of the possibilities of the Chinese! Their commercial aptitude, political capacity, literary aspirations, and moral sympathies excite most the wonder of those who know them best. Think of the receptive, plastic, energetic, versatile genius of the Japanese! Think of the subtle in-

Pearson, *National Life and Character*.

tellect and manifold gifts of the Hindu ! We must not permit temporary friction to blind us to God's vast and final design concerning these nations. We must persist to see in them—illuminated, regenerated, Christianized—the glory of the world to be. The voice of the Lord will disclose these forests full of olive, sandalwood, and cedar ; the burden-bearers of the Lord will find in these remote quarries all manner of precious stones for the walls and battlements of the city of God.

The heathen and savage tribes are also full of promise, rich in undeveloped faculty. A competent observer has predicted that, whatever may be the music of the future, the Kaffir will be the musician. Richard Semon writes : " I dare to maintain that the love of artistic ornament is deeper and more general in the poor and naked savages of New Guinea than in ourselves." Can we believe that all these endowments are vain ? that these tribes are destined to become the curse of the future ? Where did *we* spring from ? Once a few burden-bearers and hewers of the mountains landed on this foggy isle in the Northern seas, and, with a great faith, began their unpromising work of attempting to Christianize a horde of painted barbarians ; and out of their desperate undertaking has arisen the foremost civilization of the world ! We will not believe that the barbarous and semi-barbarous races of to-day are destined to become the plague of the future. If we believe in the rationality of the universe, in

the mission of the Lord Jesus, in the promise of revelation, we cannot believe in anything of the kind ; it is far more sane to believe that once more the calling of the Gentiles will enrich the race gloriously. The botanist reminds us that, if we carefully dissect one of the numerous leaf buds on the winter trees, we shall find that the leaves of the coming summer are already present ; all that the summer's light and heat will do is to increase their size. We need only note the incipient intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties of the savage to find promise of a glorious future. The gifts of God are here already, they wait unrealized ; all that is needed is the light and power of the Gospel to stimulate and ripen the latent yet budding wealth of the backward races. The intellectual dilettante sniffs at the humble, toiling missionary ; yet the despised delvers and hewers of God will bring to light treasures beyond all rubymines, malachite-quarries, pearl-fisheries, and the sands of gold which dazzle the adventurer. Glorious day, indeed, when all that has been put into mankind shall be happily brought out ; when the Yellow Peril, the Black Peril, and all other coloured perils shall prove crowning civilizations. "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary ; and I will make the place of My feet glorious."

Upon the lapsed classes of our great cities we look with confident hope. Our Master saw the

magnificent possibilities of humanity at the worst. Any one appreciates a picture by Rembrandt when it is exhibited in a gold frame in the National Gallery ; but a fine eye is requisite to detect a masterpiece beneath dirt and grime in a canvas confounded with the lumber of a cellar. Our Lord recognized the grandeur of humanity, not when He beheld it in a gold frame in a palace, but in the destitute, the disinherited, the hopeless. When we were yet without strength, plunged in a gulf of dark despair, every jewel shaken out of our crown, every purple rag torn from our shoulders, He recognized our essential worth and flew to our relief. He has imparted His genius to His people. He has caused them to discern the intrinsic glory of the savage, the slave, the sot ; and, however the cynic may mock, these rejected ones are perpetually being restored to life and immortality. The sculptor can discern in the jagged quarry of Carrara galleries of beauteous imagery ; in the wild forest of Lebanon the architect can see palaces and temples ; and since Christ opened our eyes compounds and slums dazzle us with the most splendid possibilities of life and destiny.

## XV

### THE UNREASONABLENESS OF FEAR

*He shall not be afraid of evil tidings : his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.—Ps. cxii. 7.*

SERIOUS minds are specially liable to anxiety. A certain class is little troubled about the future ; it takes events for granted, waits for something to turn up, is equally indifferent whatever comes to pass. Such is the temper of the barbarian, and of those not far removed from him. Without a serious conception of life, they are without apprehension ; devoid of anxiety because they lack rationality. The civilized, with aspiration and the sense of responsibility, are the natural subjects of solicitude ; and a high state of civilization, like that which we happily share, brings its special peril. Life with us is exceedingly complex, and things are delicately poised, the possibilities of vicissitude are immensely heightened, and the consequences of change are frequently most serious. Not rarely we seem separated from poverty, helplessness, and despair only by a sheet of tissue-paper, and anxiety appears the most natural thing in the world. Yet, despite all this, we wish to show that the solicitude which distracts and consumes is wholly unreasonable in Christian men.

I. THE ANXIETY OF THE CHRISTIAN PARTAKES OF THE NATURE OF THE FOOLISH TERROR OF THE CHILD. The nervousness of little children is often extreme. Every article in the moonlight appears to them as ghostly, every passing footfall betrays a robber, the darkness teems with monsters. What fantastic misconceptions and agonies of suspense, what torture of listening and cold sweats the little ones suffer when left alone in the darkness! Their heart throbs faster and faster, until at last, overwhelmed with nameless terror, they sob or shriek. But in later years we know how gratuitous all this suffering was, how groundless our fears, how absurd the whole situation created by the fevered imagination. The position of the scared child, however, exactly represents that of man in this present existence. This life is encompassed by the darkness of the night. We have not yet seen daylight—only starlight, moonlight; and in the obscurity we are haunted by vain suspicions. This life is also the childhood of existence. We are of yesterday, and know nothing. So we misconstrue, misjudge, and disquiet ourselves in vain.

An infant crying in the night:  
 An infant crying for the light:  
 And with no language but a cry.

Yet we now look back on the dark nights of our childhood and smile at our baseless fears; so we are persuaded that the age will come when we shall look upon the shadows and spectres of the



present, and know the utter folly of the misgivings which to-day are so real and terrible.

What in the meantime shall be our strength and consolation? The best answer to this question is found by asking another. What was our best comfort in troubled childhood? The certain reply to which query is, The knowledge that our father or mother was not far away. If we could discern the faintest sign that they were about, or catch a note of their strong, sweet voice, the ghosts vanished and we fell on sleep. Our strength and consolation amid the darkness and mystery of time are the same. "Your heavenly Father knoweth." These are the magical words to soothe the faithful, to convict the unbelieving of unreasonableness and sin. In a letter of Lafcadio Hearn we read, "Anxiety is a poison; and I do not know how much more of it I could stand. It was a friend's treachery that broke me up recently. . . . I don't know that being brave would serve me much." This wail of one with no faith in God we can understand; the despair of atheism is reasonable. If the universe is not regulated by a wise and gracious Spirit, if no Providence shapes the individual life, and all things fall out by chance in the dark, there is ample justification for mistrust and apprehension; that the atheist should be a pessimist is natural, logical. But it is altogether another thing when we once believe in the heavenly Father; from that moment uneasiness and foreboding become

inconsistent and irrational. Surely He will defend, succour, guide, and save us. Whatever the darkness of life, the threatenings of circumstance, or the mystery of death, cling to the thought of the fatherhood of God until the day dawn and the shadows flee away.

Let us, however, apprehend the fatherhood of God as revealed in Christ Jesus. "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And as St. Paul thus writes in the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Peter uses identical words in his first letter. This is the God whom we are called upon to adore and trust. It is of the first importance that we thus apprehend the fatherhood of God; if our faith in that doctrine is to become the basis of assured confidence, we must do so. The attempt is being made, with increasing frequency, to found the divine fatherhood in Naturalism. A distinguished poet who recently passed away wrote to the effect that, in dying, we might safely trust to sink into His bosom "who created the rose." This will not do. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead"; but the fatherhood, with its infinite wealth of meaning, has been revealed only in the Son of the Father's love. Beside the rose, nature has produced abundant growths which sting and poison; and the dubious

mind is far more apt to fasten on the nightshade rather than the rose, the hemlock rather than the violet. Nature furnishes a ground for faith, also an apology for mistrust. But there are no obscurities and contradictions in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He who has loved us even to the gift of His well-beloved Son will surely not permit us to lack any good thing. We may sink with absolute confidence into His bosom who gave us the Rose of Sharon. Surely *He* will never leave nor forsake us. Not a fear must infest our heart, a murmur escape our lip, nor a tear dim our eye.

II. THE ANXIETY OF THE CHRISTIAN PARTAKES OF THE TERROR OF THE SAVAGE. Because the savage is ignorant of the laws which govern the system of nature, he becomes the victim of many wild and distressing fancies. The storm and eclipse, the lightning and thunder, inspire him with boundless terror, because he interprets them by an arbitrary and a gloomy imagination. The case with the civilized man is totally different. He has come to understand the beautiful laws which regulate the movements of the stars and elements; and the scientist regards with perfect confidence and satisfaction, admiration and delight, the very phenomena which occasion the savage the ghastliest terror. "They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at Thy tokens; Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." Even gracious signals are misinterpreted by the untutored mind.

The anxiety of the Christian has its origin in a defective faith in the divine government of the world, and is so far kindred with the fear of the superstitious heathen. This is the teaching of our Lord: "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." The anxious mood is essentially heathen. Could we once believe in our very heart that God rules, that He rules wisely, that He rules delicately for the individual as generally for the universe at large, we should regard even dark signs with serene confidence; but, with a defective sense of His gracious and distinguishing sovereignty, we misconstrue His tokens, and, instead of the morning and evening rejoicing, they are profaned by murmurings and lamentations.

We do in so many words believe in the divine government, in its theoretic and executive perfection; yet in actual life we are easily staggered, and are incapable of resting in the precious articles of our Christian faith. A recent traveller describes the singular manner in which the superstition of the Chinese asserts itself, notwithstanding their modern knowledge. "The Chinese were apt pupils of both Arab and Jesuit teachers, and the Board of Astronomers is one of the most important of the government departments to-day. They compute eclipses and calculate solar and lunar incidents with precision for the official calendar or almanac; but, when the moment of the eclipse arrives, the members of the honourable board assemble in the courtyard in state robes, and fran-

tically beat tom-toms to scare away the dragon which is about to swallow the sun or the moon.”<sup>1</sup> Strange mingling of science and fanaticism! Such is the strength of superstition that, when the crisis arrives, all their verified scientific knowledge is practically ignored, and the university scholar becomes once more a barbarian beating a tom-tom.

Is it not exactly thus with the people of God? The fact of the divine government is a truism with us; repeatedly have we verified the faithfulness of the promise; we are entirely persuaded of the wisdom and benignity of the heavenly providence: yet when the testing moments of life come, when the darkness of the eclipse is in the sky, we practically fall back into moods of atheism. Copernicus lapsing into Caliban is far less surprising and distressing. So difficult is it in a sudden crisis to realize the trustworthiness and blessedness of that belief to which we gave our sanction in calmer hours. “They feared as they entered into the cloud. . . . And Peter said . . . not knowing what he said.” Staggered by a strange providence, dazed by an unexpected blow, we speak unadvisedly, act inconsistently with that faith which is nevertheless our genuine conviction. “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it.” This is the best. “Dumb with silence” until the soul recovers itself.

### III. THE ANXIETY OF THE CHRISTIAN PAR-

<sup>1</sup> Scidmore, *China, the Long-lived Empire*.

TAKES OF THE NATURE OF THE BASELESS DISTRESS OF THE BRUTE. As a grand rule, the beast of the field is wiser than the saint ; it is true to the law of its being, enjoys the sensation of the moment, and mechanically completes its destiny. But, placed in unusual circumstances, it displays baseless and fruitless anxiety and trepidation. We read that, " though the beavers in the Zoölogical Gardens are fed every day and have nothing to fear from the weather, the instinct of winter storage is as strong as ever ; whether this prudence is accompanied by a rational knowledge of the probable inadequacy of their stock to meet their natural wants is another matter. If their sense of quantity bears any proportion to their industry and skill in engineering, they must be full of anxiety and misgivings, for the few branches given them are only in make-believe ; and they are wholly dependent on their captors for daily food." Is not this sketch of the beavers fussily occupied with engineering a few branches as though their whole sustenance and safety through the winter depended upon their exertions, when in fact a superior power was providing for them, a lively parable of the anxiety of the saints as depicted by our Lord in Matthew vi. 25, 34, whilst all the time a supreme and loving Power, with largest outlook and fullness of resource, provides for all their need ? They are excited, worried, exhausted by solicitude about secular needs, as though unconscious of the magnificent and tender government



which holds as sacred the most trifling detail of human life.

In regard to many of the darker fears which torment us we are painfully irrational. On the railway we may often see cattle flying before a whiff of steam as though a wolf or leopard were pursuing them. Are we any wiser? Most of us have sniffed ruin in bits of vapour, and suffered martyrdoms in frantically seeking to escape them. Elihu Burritt tells the story of a driver who had to take a herd of cattle through a long, dark, wooden tunnel. Some knots in the planks had dropped out, and through these orifices the sun made bars of light in the darkness. The animals shied at these rays, then leaped over them, finally making a terrible hurdle-race of it and coming out at the other end covered with foam and blood. All unnecessary, all absurd! How much wiser are we? Do we not take fright at harmless things? Are we not troubled by what is really heaven's light? Are we not agonized by difficulties purely imaginary? Do we not construe advantages into barricades? Do we not rush through dark providences in panic and paroxysm? Are not many of us anticipating with dread that last dark tunnel lighted by streaming rays of glory? "So brutish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before Thee."

Irrational—just that; and confused reason is more dangerous than disordered mechanism or baffled instinct. Our reason is our glory, and

therefore are we ashamed whenever we put ourselves to pains and perils by yielding to craven fear. Noble crews are courageous in the storm, brave soldiers self-possessed in the battle ; and we all lose caste in our own eyes whenever we fail to play the man. Carlyle teaches " that the extent to which we have put fear under our feet is a good measure of manhood " ; and it is an indubitable sign of spiritual manhood when we have put fear under our feet and resolutely keep it there. " For God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness ; but of power and love and discipline." " No spirit of craven fear hath God bestowed on us, but of might, and of love, and of self-control."<sup>1</sup> Panic and cowardice do not pertain to the ideal man of God, but calmness, strength, and moral discipline. We pray that God will forgive our sins ; we ought to plead that He will forgive our alarms, for these are sins also, dishonouring to ourselves and to Him.

Fearfulness and trembling are every way to be deprecated. Fear has a direct tendency to impair the reason. The moment we give place to it we fail in attention, wisdom, and justness of judgment. We speak of one in a panic as having " lost his head " ; that member contains the brain, and the condition is sad indeed if that organ is missing. In the absence of calmness, reflection, logic, anything may happen to us. Fear robs the soul of sunshine. It mars the days of health by

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Way, *The Letters of St. Paul*.

thoughts of distant sickness ; spoils the pleasant hours of friendship by apprehensions of separation and bereavement ; blights the rare season of prosperity by prophesyings of loss and misery. It is a real misfortune to make less by one the summer days of the soul.

Fear eats out the heroism of the heart, destroying the fibre and force so essential when the day of real trial comes. We have wasted on imaginary evils the reserve power of life. And gratuitous fear has a strange power to bring upon us the very evil we deprecate. It diverts attention from the real perils against which we ought to be on guard, whilst it provokes evils which naturally we have little reason to apprehend. A confident, bold front awes the foe ; if we are afraid of a dog, it bites us.

We have every reason for absolute confidence in God our Saviour. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear ; but ye received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Let us brood and pray until we get the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood out of our creed into the heart. Let us be sure of adoption into His family, of participation in His image, of our destination in His kingdom, and all the sadness of solicitude will leave us forever. Anxiety about this world and worlds unknown will be simply impossible, because we shall know and feel it to be absolutely unreason-

able. "And He said unto them, Why are ye fearful? have ye not faith?" (Mark iv. 40). "Let not your heart turn coward" (John xiv. 27). Nothing more misbecomes us than to live anxious lives. With Christ in the storm we are in port. As the old poet sings :

There is no storm but this  
Of your own cowardice  
That braves you out.  
You are the storm that mocks  
Yourselves ; you are the rocks  
Of your own doubt :  
Besides this fear of danger, there's no danger here ;  
And he that here fears danger, does deserve his fear.

## XVI

### LIMITATION AND COÖPERATION

*And thou mayest add thereto.—I CHRON. xxii. 14.*

HAVING done his utmost to facilitate the building of the temple, David now commends the great work to the faithfulness and enthusiasm of his son. The text is brief, yet it implies great principles worthy of close consideration by all workers for God and mankind. It has a pathetic side, also an aspect of consolation and encouragement; and it is in the consideration of both that we get a true estimate of the duty of life.

I. THE PATHETIC SIDE OF OUR TEXT. The limitation of the individual. David could not project and accomplish the whole scheme by virtue of his own power and resource. He at once discovered that he must take Solomon into partnership; Solomon forthwith found it necessary to enlist the sympathies of the princes; whilst the princes, in turn, were constrained to appeal to the people. It is surprising how soon we exhaust our personal power and resource, and must look beyond ourselves if cherished purposes are to be brought to pass. Limitations of one sort or another condition us all. We can play only a part, a small part, and play that part only for a little while.

We are subject to *constitutional* circumscriptions from which is no escape. We work happily and effectively only within the lines prescribed by our special natural endowment. We see this in the greatest men. The mathematician who wished to know what *Paradise Lost* proved disclosed his own limitation. It proved that a cell was wanting in his brain. Sir Humphry Davy, passing through the Louvre, exclaimed, "What an extraordinary collection of fine frames!" showing that one may be acute in science and blind to art. When Turner, the prince of painters, took to writing poetry, the result was not happy. Occasionally a many-sided genius arises; but, as a grand rule, the "all-round" man is a myth. And if this is the case with outstanding talent, it is even more markedly the case with the average man.

One science only will one genius fit;  
So wide is art, so narrow human wit.

We may easily get into a niche for which we were not made, attempt work for which we have no aptitude, undertake tasks in which Nature herself forbids that we should excel. God has declared our narrow, predestined sphere in the lines of our body and brain; and it is most pathetic to see a man struggling to get out of his skin and attempting to be what God did not intend him to be, to do work that was never given to him to do.

We suffer *circumstantial* circumscriptions. David possessed gifts and cherished aspirations which



the trend and pressure of events did not permit him to exercise and satisfy. The sword was thrust into his hand, when he coveted the harp ; he was entangled in politics, whilst he burned to sing ; and empire-building became his duty, whilst temple-building was his passion. Our body does not furnish utterance for the fullness of the spirit ; our present life is not nearly so wide, various, and rich as the soul. Some birds in their wild state are without song, although they possess highly developed song-muscles, which they turn to account as soon as favourable circumstances allow. Have we not muscles without music ? Do not we consciously possess powers, faculties, possibilities, and aspirations, which are cramped and denied by organization and circumstance ? It is a strong argument for a future world that we are much too big for this. We are not here to develop our greatness, only to prove our faithfulness ; and therefore are we stewards of a "few things." Let us prove faithful, and God shall grant us a richer organ, a wider sphere, and "many things." But for to-day the environment dominates the soul, denying its vast and manifold longings.

*Mutability and mortality* complete our restrictions. "So David prepared abundantly before his death." Life's little day thrusts into small room our large and manifold speculations. A celebrated artist painted conspicuously in his studio a death's-head, not out of a morbid temper, but that the fugitiveness of opportunity should be

kept in constant remembrance. Whether or not we thus grimly remind ourselves of the fact, infirmity, age, and death quickly mar cherished dreams. "We are strangers and pilgrims, as all our fathers were."

All this is just as true of the higher service of the race as of intellectual, political, and material service. We are hedged in by manifold necessities, and can effect only here a little and there a little. The ablest must learn humility; for the richest, strongest, wisest, and most gifted are the victims of infirmity and disadvantage, whilst the average man can do so little that it is easy for him to think it not worth the doing at all; it seems less than nothing, and vanity. We recently read the story of a devoted missionary, and the record of his noble life brings home to the reader most painfully how seriously the work of God is attended by disappointment and disenchantment. How endless the difficulties which beset and crippled this heroic worker! how disheartening the learning of the language, the unhealthiness of the climate, the fanaticism of the people! What tedious preparations, faint beginnings, provoking postponements, ambiguous successes, melancholy failures! We lay such a biography down with a sense of the extreme difficulties which must be conquered, and of the incompetence of the most gifted agents to achieve anything apparently adequate. But this is true of every life and endeavour. The faded leaf dropping from the autumn

tree seems to have rounded its life and fulfilled its destiny much more completely than does frail, baffled humanity sinking into the dust. Our life seems only a striving, our work a fragment.

II. THE ASPECT OF CONSOLATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT PRESENTED BY OUR TEXT. "And thou mayest add thereto." The insignificance of the individual worker is lost sight of in the social law which consolidates and conserves the humblest endeavour. In two particulars the text is instructive and inspiring.

It reminds us of the *continuity* of human service. David did what was possible to him, and then transmitted his undertaking to his son. A wonderful social law gives coherence, continuity, and permanence to human action. Leo Grindon writes: "Nothing so plainly distinguishes between man and brutes as the absolute *nothingness of effect* in the work of the latter. Unless the coral isles be deemed an exception, of all the past labours of all the animals that ever existed there is not a trace extant." These creatures are sagacious, they are intense, they have toiled unweariedly from the beginning of time; but their work is as ephemeral as themselves. No law of sequence, perpetuation, and accumulation gives unity and permanence to their creations. If all the creatures perished to-day, nothing of their almost infinite activity would survive. It is altogether different with man. Frail and fugitive as the individual may be, he yet has the power

and privilege of bequeathing his small personal contribution to the general and ever-increasing wealth of the race. A physical law in the animal world economizes the experience of the individual for the benefit of the species; but we enjoy the immense advantage of a social law which preserves and perpetuates in an extraordinary degree the services and sacrifices of the humblest individual.

Continuity and conservation prevail in the *intellectual world*. The glorious things of our literature, science, and art are legacies of our gifted ancestors which have come to us through a long series of generations who have each added thereto. Other men have laboured, and we have entered into their labours. Discoveries in science are the result of the research and brooding of many students through centuries. Our inventions in industrial life are the outcome of the dreams of many dreamers. The architecture of Assyria, the astronomy of Chaldea, the pottery of Etruria, the wisdom of Egypt, the moral science of Palestine, the art of Greece, the jurisprudence of Rome, are with us to-day powerfully moulding contemporaneous thought and life. Bees have been busy through countless summers, yet no fragment of their store survives; but swarms of golden bees, from Homer to Tennyson, from Plato to John Ruskin, have filled a million cells in the British Museum with sweetness. Although the birds have piped from the morning of time, no phonograph preserves their music; but the songs of

ancient minstrels stir our hearts to-day. Through millenniums ants, beavers, and birds have built cunning structures, yet no monument attests their skill and energy; but a thousand splendid cities full of treasure are the heirlooms of the human race.

In *national life* the continuity of service conspicuously obtains. "One generation shall praise Thy name to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts." Whether we praise His name or refrain, our national wealth and greatness have been treasured and transmitted through many generations. Our fathers bequeathed us this great empire, created and defended by their toils, sacrifices, and sufferings. Heroes, the larger part of them uncelebrated, vindicated our civil rights on bloody fields. Our religious freedom and privilege were won by a noble army of martyrs. "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out." Thus perishing at the stake, Latimer cried to his fellow martyr. Our vast empire, with its glory and blessing, is the sum-total of the contributions of a few spendid spirits, but chiefly of millions of obscure patriots who added infinitesimally to its knowledge, righteousness, and happiness.

In the *religious* sphere the conservation of power and effort is simply absolute. No Church is the creation of a great genius, or the creation

of an aristocracy of ability and saintliness ; but each Church is the sum-total of millions of minute contributions made by modest men and women altogether unhistoric. It is said that from every leaf of a tree a fine thread strikes, running along the branch, down the stem, into the root ; and when the leaf falls, this slender fibre remains, giving increasing bulk and strength to the tree year by year. So Christians drop unrecorded into the grave, like leaves into the dust ; but each member, departing, adds a vital fibre to the organism, and the accumulation of these minute increments gives increasing strength and splendour to the Church of God which, like a tree of life, hastens to overshadow the nations.

Let us beware of despising our action and influence because they appear inconsiderable. He was the man with one talent who buried it, and the lesser gifted are always most tempted to ignore themselves ; yet, if the main multitude with the one talent are unfaithful, what will become of society left to a few geniuses ? True, we soon lose sight of any little contribution we make to the common good, but really that is of no consequence. The African proverb shrewdly observes, "The meat may be boiled into shreds, but it is still in the pot." We readily lose sight of the survival of our gift or endeavour, but it none the less enriches the general life of mankind. We are foolish, indeed, to fret because we cannot keep the results of our work in sight ; if that work were



truly done, it may be left with absolute confidence. We were told the other day of a child who, by sundry pathetic economies, had got together a shilling which she was persuaded to put into the Post Office Savings Bank. Coming out of the office, the mother noticed that the little one was fretting. "What is the matter, dear?" inquired the mother. Said the child, "That clerk has mixed my shilling with a lot more, and I shall never see it again." We are strangely like the child, as we fret over our vanishing efforts in the flux of things. Let us wipe our tears. Put your contribution into the treasury of the King, whatever it may be; and be sure that you shall, in due season, receive your own with usury.

Let us also remember that, though our day of service is short, and we pass like shadows, yet our work abides. The Hindu proverb pointedly appeals to us: "If you die, the world will not become a skeleton." No, it will not; after our decease the sun will rise as bright as ever, the bells hurry the toiler to his task, boys will cry the papers in the crowded streets, buying and selling will briskly continue, marrying and giving in marriage, laughter, and tears. The world will not become a skeleton; its eyes will be as bright as ever, its brain as active, its hands as full. The world will survive us, survive us for long ages, and whatever we put into it of true thought, pure feeling, gracious impulse, will live in the uplifted character and civilization of countless generations.

We appear only as phantoms, our utmost work as an unconsidered trifle ; but in the solidarity of the race we mysteriously become universal and immortal.

We are reminded of the *complementariness* of human service. What David could not finish was completed by his son. What is missing in one is found in another ; individual deficiency is supplied by comrade or successor. Each true servant of God furnishes a segment, and when these multitudinous segments are pieced by the supreme Hand they form a vast and perfect circle.

The multitude of teachers, utterly unlike each other in so many respects, unconsciously concur to bring out the whole truth. "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas" ; yet the threefold, nay, the thousandfold ministry, is necessary to bring out the infinite truth. Each teacher presents the jewel at a particular angle, eliciting a sparkle not otherwise revealed. He has his special theme, peculiar point of view, and characteristic style of treatment. We may rebel against our personal limitations, attempting subjects and methods not native to us ; but such discontent is unreasonable, and can only issue in failure. Let each teacher humbly accept himself, and be content to transmit the heavenly light with the tint of his individuality, as the great Head of the Church has ordained. Let us also welcome faithful men of all orders of thought and style.

Infinite harm is wrought by exclusiveness. If the messengers of Christ are not exactly to our taste, we suspect and depreciate them. Serious injury is done to the Church of God by narrow preference and unsympathetic criticism. Yet teachers of no one style can express the infinity of the Gospel, or meet the practically infinite differentiations of the human mind. Amongst the great company of the prophets, each true to God and His Word, each with his individual appreciation of truth and grace, each with his unique style of setting it forth, the world gets the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel. The beauty of the world is the aggregation of millions of incompletenesses; the music of the world is the outcome of millions of dissonances; and the glory and efficacy of the Church of Christ are the issues of the marshalled multitudinousness of incomplete and often apparently contradictory gifts and organs. Who am I that I should hint dislike of any instrument my Master sees fit to use? And, on the other hand, if my Master condescends to use my singular gifts, let me dismiss self-discontent and be deaf to the criticisms which discourage and silence.

A multitude of workers, individually unlike, delightfully cover the whole field of service. "The League of Pity" fascinates some, the "Royal Humane Society" others. Schools for the Blind, Deaf, Dumb, and Crippled, have each earnest advocates. Some are enthusiastic on the Blue

Riband, others on the White. "Homes" of a hundred different kinds have their warm admirers and generous contributors, who think their particular institution of absorbing interest. "Hospitals," "Associations," "Societies," "Asylums" for the sick, young, aged, destitute, and dying engross the sympathies of a host of humanitarians and evangelists who have little in common. Medical, Prison, Industrial, Deep-sea Fishing, Railway, Stable-boys, Prison-gates, Missions and a crowd more of diverse agencies seek to deal with the sin, suffering, sorrow, and necessities of various classes; and around each enterprise of blessing gather sympathetic souls, as filings around the magnetized steel. It is simply wonderful how Christian people are moved to take up special kinds of work, some kinds being very special indeed. An advertisement sets forth that a certain Sheffield firm are "makers of eccentric blades." It is easy to understand that a straight blade would sometimes be useless and an eccentric one indispensable. The Church needs such blades, and it has them; but, so far from complaining of this originality and versatility, let us recognize in it the action of the divine Spirit constraining into His service souls of every order of gift and aptitude, and touching them sometimes to strange issues, that a world far too disordered to be set right by any particular agent, programme, or instrument may yet be reached and saved. As geologists, astronomers, chemists, and many other

workers in nature together complete the circle of sciences, so the various servants of Christ and humanity, actuated by the sovereign Spirit, minister to the manifold needs of the race, completing the sublimer circle of infinite charity. "Moreover, there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work." Let them, then, strengthen each other's hands.

Workers of the different spheres, industrial and intellectual, political and educational, secular and sacred, must remember how essential they are to each other, and how they complete each other. An Asiatic story relates that, once upon a time, four travellers spent a night in a forest, and agreed that one of them should keep watch by turns while the others slept. The first watcher was a carpenter. By way of passing the time, he took his axe, and, out of the stem of a tree, fashioned the form of a woman, shapely in figure and comely in face. Then he awoke one of his comrades, and lay down to rest. The second watcher was a tailor; and when he saw the wooden woman lying bare on the ground, he produced his work-basket and bundle of stuffs, and clothed her handsomely from head to foot. Then he, too, resumed his slumber, after having aroused the third of the party, who was a jeweller. And the jeweller was struck by the sight of the fair and well-dressed female form, and he opened his caskets, and decked her with rings, necklaces, and bracelets. Then he called

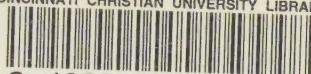
the last of the party, who was a holy man, strong in prayer and incantation, and went to sleep. And when the fourth watcher saw the wooden woman, so well dressed and decked, he set to work, and by spells and prayers turned her wood into flesh and blood and inspired her with life. Just then his three companions awoke, and gazed with wonder and admiration at the lovely creature who stood before them. Simultaneously each of the four travellers claimed her as his wife: the carpenter because he had framed her; the tailor because he had dressed her; the jeweller because he had adorned her; and the holy man because he had given her life. A fierce dispute arose amongst them, during which the fair bride vanished from their sight. So, by the combined action of craftsman, politician, philosopher, and theologian must beauty, love, and purity rejoice the earth. Each has his special sphere and service: the industrialist supplies the material elements which are the basis of society; the economist robes it; the philosopher adorns it with intellectual gold and gems; whilst the theologian gives vitality to all the secular and intellectual workmanship of the age, and without whom all craftsmen, clothiers, and goldsmiths must be in vain. Let there be no quarrel amongst reformers, secular and sacred, lest their grand object fail; but let them work together sympathetically and hopefully until the community shall be all glorious within, whilst its dress throughout shall be of fine needlework and wrought gold.





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